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Tradition and transition in English language teaching methodology[1]

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Abstract

The field of English language teaching is in transition, as it seeks new approaches, and re-examines older ones, in order to address the range and level of English proficiency required for participation in today's global community. This article describes the context of the transitional period, discusses the contributions of second language acquisition theory and research therein, and reviews classroom principles and related techniques that have already emerged.

Keywords: English language teaching; Applied second language research; Communicative curricula; Classroom language learning

1. Introduction

The field of language teaching has been one of tradition and transition since its inception hundreds, indeed, by some accounts, thousands of years ago (Kelly, 1969; Howatt, 1984; Richards and Rodgers, 1986). The teaching of the English language, although a much newer pursuit than the teaching of languages such as Greek and Latin or Chinese, for example, has already been through many transitions in methodology. What are now considered traditional methods were once the innovations of their time, characterized by the attitudes and values of their creators, who recommended that other educators abandon one method and choose another, with

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unquestioning optimism, as though this latter were the solution to their classroom concerns (Clarke 1982).

In the past 50 years alone, English language teaching has gone through a whirlwind of transitions in its methodology, from grammar translation to direct method, to audiolingualism, to cognitive code, and a host of variations in each. Other methods, their range of implementation much smaller in scope, have also been introduced. Among the most popular of these are Silent Way (Gattegno, 1972), Total Physical Response (Asher, 1969), Suggestopedia (Lazanov, 1978), and Counseling Learning (Curran, 1972). In recent years, the most substantive transition in English language teaching has taken place through a collection of practices, materials, and beliefs about teaching and learning that are known by many different names, e.g. communicative methodology, communicative language teaching, and communicative approach (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).

Currently, English teaching methodology is going through yet another transition. This transition, frequently referred to as the 'post method' condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994), is the outgrowth of highly linked developments in the wider field of language studies. First, there has been a broadening in the scope and diversity of English language use needed for participation in today's global community. This development has been accompanied by a recognition of the need to guide English language learners toward high levels of proficiency, and to do so as effectively and efficiently as possible (e.g. Kachru, 1986; Ashworth, 1991; Morley, 1991).

Secondly, there has been a growing body of research that is related to instructional issues, observations, and concerns. Numerous studies have found that to guide the learning process second language (L2) learners benefit from a variety of experiences. These range from direct instruction and correction of students to conversational communication. What the studies have shown, moreover, is that such experiences need to be offered, not randomly or eclectically, but rather, in a highly selective and principled way. Selection depends on stages of L2 development, strategies of cognitive processing, and features of linguistic complexity (e.g. Celce-Murcia, 1991; Lightbown and Spada, 1993; Doughty and Williams, 1998).

What is emerging is an integration of important components of older and more recent methods and a reconceptualization of them, often in light of principles derived from second language acquisition (SLA) theory and research. This article will review the integration and reconceptualization, and the role of SLA research therein. First, however, is a review of several traditions that characterize most every method of language teaching, across transitions and over time.

2. Tradition in teaching methodology

2.1. Commonality and complexity

All methods have their own conceptually distinctive characteristics, of course, but together they share several important commonalities. First, every method purports to be a better method than others, and has most likely commanded both a loyal

following of supporters and a disbelieving chorus of skeptics. Indeed, an increasing number of methodologists would argue that no single method could possibly meet all of a learner's needs. As Kumaravadivelu (1994) has argued, teachers must seek not alternative methods, but an alternative to methods. Such an alternative would be based on their professional experience and awareness of learner needs, and the adjustments they make to cope with the realities and dynamics of the classroom.

Secondly, each method is affected by the contexts in which it is implemented. Thus, even the most prescriptive or rigid method will be implemented differently, depending on whether it is being used within a second or a foreign language environment, in a large class, or on an individual basis, to teach children, adolescents, or adults (for illustrative studies, see Chaudron, 1988, Holliday, 1997). Thus, for Holliday (1997), communicative methodology is defined more by the cultural continuity between teacher practice and learner expectations for involvement in their learning than by the static constructs of group work or oral engagement by which this method is popularly defined.

Further, as many researchers point out, language teaching and learning are too complex for any individual method to remain effective for an extended period of time (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Far more critical to a learner's success are teachers who are informed about learning processes, are aware of, and sensitive to, learner needs, and draw on a variety of teaching skills in their practice (see Prabhu, 1992, for further discussion).

Finally, each method embraces goals, concerns, and values that have been sustained over time. As such, they shape the ways in which educators approach transitions in methodology or adapt to transitions forged by others. What are the common goals, concerns, and values that educators often share no matter what methods they use, or choose not to use? These will be described in the following section.

2.2. Goals, concerns, and values

The goals of educators are numerous, but foremost, perhaps, is that their students succeed at learning the language they want the students to learn. Along with their goal of student success, however, educators also share several concerns. These concerns center on their sense of responsibility for helping students succeed in their classrooms, as well as in future contexts and in endeavors that require knowledge and use of a second, third, or yet another, language.

Such concerns find particular focus in the case of English. So diverse is English language use in today's global community, that success for English language learners might mean any number of goals, and, all too often, too many goals, for them to reach through classroom study. Students may need English to engage in all sorts of communicative activities, from accomplishing daily classroom tasks and assignments, to passing school-wide examinations, preparing for the next level of instruction, excelling on college and university entrance or qualifying examinations, or applying skills in communication for travel, business, academic, and professional pursuits.

The values shared among educators are diverse, but the emphasis placed on effective teaching, however differentially defined and measured across the fields of policy and practice, suggests that the role and contribution of teachers to the classroom is critical to successful L2 learning (see Alderson and Beretta, 1992; Brown, 1995; Nunan 1991; Richards and Nunan 1991, for a range of examples). Teachers have to be especially resourceful, as they are often called on to adjust their methods to be appropriate to the needs, goals, and expectations of their students, and to be in compliance with the educational and financial resources of their schools, colleges, and universities. These are a few of the time-honored goals, concerns, and values brought into the classroom, no matter which method is employed in teaching.

Like other methods, communicative methodology embraces these goals, concerns, and values. In keeping with its learner-centered approach, its goals are focused on students and their success. Its concerns aim toward students' present needs, as well as future, and potential needs for L2 proficiency. It values teachers as facilitators of this process. One of its distinctions, however, is its perspective on the classroom processes through which teachers can best assist students with their goals and concerns. These processes have emphasized communication as both the goal of learners and the means they should use to reach this goal. As the following sections will attempt to illustrate, this assumption, that communication can be both an end and a means to L2 learning, has been called into question in light of current research. This, in turn, has contributed to the current period of transition seen in L2 teaching methodology, particularly with respect to the teaching of English.

3. Transition in English teaching methodology

3.1. Communicative language teaching: contributions and concerns

During this time of transition, it is important to point out the very robust contributions of communicative methodology to the language teaching community. As currently implemented, communicative methodology draws on the notion that L2 competence is defined not by grammatical knowledge alone, but by communicative uses as well. This definition recognizes the importance of communication to the purposes of language, to the needs of learners, and to the processes of language learning (Brumfit and Johnson, 1979; Widdowson, 1978, 1979).

Such a perspective on competence has been demonstrated throughout the classroom activities, materials, and instructional strategies of communicative methodology. As such, they focus on language as it is used for purposes of communication, and are designed for learners whose needs extend across a multiplicity of uses. In addition, the activities, materials, and strategies of communicative methodology have modified the language classroom and shifted its focus from form to function and from teacher to learner. With respect to L2 grammar, for example, linguistic forms and rules are made available to learners in indirect ways, through reading and listening to meaningful, comprehensible L2 input. This practice often de-emphasizes, or even supplants, direct instruction. A tolerance of learners' grammatical errors is

frequently preferred over correction thereof, with this latter strategy reserved exclusively for errors in the communication of message meaning.

In addition, techniques such as dictation, recitation, drill, and dialog are often placed in the background, or eliminated entirely in communicative classrooms, in order to emphasize classroom communication and discussion. The instructional staple of teacher-fronted lessons is often substituted with activities involving student role plays and problem solving, which engage the students in communication as they work in groups and pairs. As teachers try to incorporate communicative strategies throughout their work, they often find it necessary to suppress the use of their students' native language (NL), whether in planning classroom lessons or carrying out classroom activities, this even when the NL is shared among the teachers and the students.

In their emphasis on language learning for purposes of communication, such activities, materials, and strategies of communicative methodology, have come to constitute a rich and enriching curriculum that has assisted many students in their L2 learning. Research has shown that these approaches can be much more effective than grammar translation, audiolingualism, or other earlier methods in promoting students' confidence and their fluency in speech and writing, and in accelerating the early stages of their language development (e.g. Krashen, 1985; Lightbown and Spada, 1993, for reviews).

However, research has also shown that these activities, materials, and strategies, have not been sufficient to bring learners to the levels of proficiency that many now require for effective English language use (Swain, 1985; Lightbown and Spada, 1993; Long, 1996). This realization has thus challenged the popular assumption that a language can be acquired not only for purposes of communication, but also through processes of communication. As recent research has shown, this assumption does not apply to all aspects of language learning, particularly those involving complex grammar rules or subtle sociolinguistic and pragmatic strategies. This is especially apparent for the English language classroom, to which learners and teachers bring multiple goals, across academic and community contexts, and require a high level of proficiency for their success.

Indeed, it now appears that many important dimensions of the learning process might be served more effectively by activities, materials, and instructional practices that integrate communicative methodology with traditional methodologies, and do so in highly principled ways. These activities, materials, and instructional practices will be discussed below, first with respect to the research findings that underlie them, and then through a presentation of principles for their application.

3.2. Second language research: conditions and connections

With yet another transition in language teaching methodology, has come a sensitivity toward several conditions that underlie the input, feedback, and production involved in successful SLA. First, with respect to input, it is now widely held that L2 learners must have access to input that is meaningful and comprehensible in order to succeed in their learning (Krashen, 1985, 1994). When the input is not

comprehensible, learners need to be allowed, and encouraged, to indicate their difficulty through clarification questions and expressions. Their interlocutors can thereupon alleviate this difficulty by adjusting or modifying their original input in their responses (Long, 1985; Pica, et al., 1987).

An emphasis on communicative methodology can create an environment in which adjusted input is made available (Krashen, 1985, 1994). As will be discussed next, however, communicative methodology has been found to be less dependable with respect to several other conditions believed critical to successful language learning. These involve the learner's attention, accessibility to feedback, and involvement in production.

Thus, it is claimed that when attention is focused solely on communication of message meaning, learners are drawn almost exclusively to the meaning and comprehensibility of input, and only secondarily to the structures, sounds, and forms that shape the input. Such communicative experiences weaken opportunities for learners to notice how L2 sounds and structures relate to the meanings of messages they encode, how social norms are observed and maintained linguistically, and how concepts such as time, action and activity, space, number, and gender, are expressed lexically and/or morphosyntactically. Such communicative experiences can also limit access to L2 features such as functors and particles, that convey grammatical information, but carry little semantic meaning.

It has been claimed that for learners to notice such features, to understand relationships of form and meaning in context, and to apply them appropriately in their speech and writing, much of the input available to them during communication needs to be supplemented and, in some cases, greatly enhanced (Schmidt, 1990, 1992; Long, 1996).

Finally, learners need to produce spoken and written output, and to modify their speech or writing when it is not comprehensible, appropriate, or accurate (Swain, 1985, 1993). To achieve this condition requires yet another component, as students need feedback on their production so that they can modify it toward greater comprehensibility, appropriateness, and accuracy (Schmidt and Frota, 1986; Long, 1996). Otherwise, without an appropriate model, they may simply repeat themselves, make the same errors, or come up with new ones, and find that their experience of L2 learning is even more frustrating and complex than they thought it could be.

Here, too, communication alone appears to be insufficient, perhaps even detrimental, to the learner in the long run, as advanced learners seldom receive feedback on their lexical and morphosyntactic imprecisions, as long as they communicate their message meaning (Williams, 1997; Garcia Mayo and Pica, in press). As a result, many of their imprecisions go unnoticed, and there is no need for these learners to modify their production toward greater grammaticality, nor to incorporate new grammatical features toward their language development.

To review, these are among the key conditions that have been claimed for successful SLA, yet are under-addressed through experiences in communication alone. Learners must be given L2 input that is made meaningful and comprehensible. They must selectively attend to the form of the input as well as its meaning. They must produce the L2, and be given feedback in order to modify their production toward

greater comprehensibility, appropriateness, and accuracy. As will be elaborated throughout the sections that follow, these dimensions of SLA have also helped to motivate and inform the current transition in language teaching methodology.

4. Transition from principal method to principles in method

As noted above, there are many communicative activities, materials, and instructional strategies that strive to bring learners opportunities for successful L2 learning. However, communication, by nature, cannot address learners' needs completely, because it is focused primarily on the meaning of messages, rather than on the form that messages take. To draw learners' attention to the forms of messages that encode their meaning has thus become one of the foremost challenges to English teaching methodology. The urgency of this challenge has further led the field into this time of transition, and guided it toward a principled selection of teaching strategies, activities, and materials drawn from traditional methods. Those that seem especially relevant to learners' needs and goals for English learning at this time are reviewed below, and then discussed in the sections that follow.

The teaching strategies to be described include first, direct instruction and correction. Both can be implemented to help learners acquire L2 features that are difficult to access from simply listening to, or reading, its messages and texts, and from focusing on message meaning without attention to message form. Among the features to be discussed, therefore, are rules of grammar and culture that bear such close resemblance to those in students' NL that they fail to notice them in communicative input, or to rely on them to comprehend such input. Approaching these features directly is important because, as noted above, inaccuracy in their expression often makes little difference in communication of message meaning. Students are unlikely to obtain feedback to guide them toward grammatical or sociolinguistic precision.

Also to be discussed below are activities through which these teaching strategies can be implemented. These include decision-making, information exchange, dictogloss, and dictocomp tasks, which bear some resemblance to traditional activities such as grammar exercises, dictation, and recitation. What makes these three activities transitional and, therefore, distinct from their latter counterparts, however, is that they are designed to focus learners' attention on grammatical features and forms in relation to meaning. In so doing, they also appear to guide students further and faster along the path of grammar learning than formal exercises or communication experiences alone can do.

Activities such as these, however, even when carried out among students as they work in small groups or pairs, cannot be accomplished without the careful planning, input, and orchestration of teachers who are thoroughly involved in their students' language learning. To be discussed below, therefore, is the transition in perception of the teacher's contribution to students' learning and the principles and generalizations on which it is based, these largely borne studies into the contributions of teacher-centered and student-to-student instruction and interaction. Also

discussed, will be research on the importance of the student's NL, and its selective contributions in classroom planning, interaction, and information exchange.

5. Instruction and correction

In prior years, when attention was given to instruction and correction, this was accomplished largely on the basis of the ideas and motivations of textbook writers, their editors, and publishers, and was actualized in a number of ways. Sometimes, for example, the ideas came from the fields of linguistics and education. Here, the importance and degree of difficulty of a rule could be the determinant of its order of instruction and responsiveness to corrective feedback. Sometimes the ideas came from particular methods, especially those that stressed rule practice and application. Sometimes they were effective in assisting grammar development, but many other times they were not, which was, no doubt, a source of frustration to students and teachers. All too often, they were driven by political forces and market-driven motives, as Phillipson (1992) and Richards (1984) have described and documented.

Fortunately, research on language learning has uncovered a good deal about the scope and sequence of grammar learning, and the role of instruction and corrective feedback in this activity. Numerous researchers have contributed to this effort. Although it is agreed that communication, instruction, and feedback have roles to play in L2 learning, researchers can now identify fairly confidently which dimensions of an L2 can be learned through an emphasis on communication and which might respond better to an emphasis on instruction and correction. This is expressed in the following principles, which themselves are based on reviews by Harley (1993), Lightbown and Spada (1993), Long (1991, 1996) and Pica (1994). These principles reflect ways in which instruction and corrective feedback can enhance the learning of L2 forms and features that are difficult for learners to notice in the input available to them, yet are vital for the communication of meaning in such input.

5.1. Attention

To benefit from grammar instruction, learners must be able to focus attention on L2 form in relation to message meaning. English verb inflections are especially illustrative, as most are reduced, unstressed, or elided. Many are voiceless and, therefore, difficult to hear. They often go unnoticed in either spoken or written input, because they are not necessary for comprehension. As such, they are redundant with other linguistic or situational aspects of context, and require greater highlighting for the learner, the kinds of highlighting that instruction can provide.

Research has shown consistently that the most effective instruction is that in which meaningful communication is emphasized as well as form is addressed. (Brock, et al., 1986; Harley, 1989; Lightbown and Spada, 1990; Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993); White, 1990, 1991; Day and Shapson, 1991; Lightbown et al., 1991). Genesee (1994) provides a relevant example, suggesting that texts be adapted or created to highlight the use of verb endings in context. As such, the texts might

center around stories, histories, world events, and provide at least one category of verb contrast and one or more modalities, from reading and/or listening to the text, taking notes on it, and reporting it back to other class members.

5.2. Focus

Learners' attention needs to be drawn not only to L2 features, but to their own interlanguage errors as well. Research has shown that teachers' reduced repetitions of students' errors, with emphasis on one error per feedback move, is highly associated with learners' correct responses, much more so than were expansions or elaborations of learners' utterances or isolated suppliance of a correct form (Chaudron, 1977). Thus, simple, short feedback that highlights one error at a time appears to be more effective than a complete overhaul of the learner's message. This should not imply that teachers imitate students' production, save for correction of only one error. Rather, it suggests that teachers continue to use target varieties of the L2, but draw attention to only one feature at a time, e.g. verb tense contrasts. Thus, the teacher can first offer a completely accurate version of the students' entire message, then segment one particular word or phrase, and draw the learner's attention to that.

5.3. Readiness

One of the earliest claims to emerge from L2 research was that learners' errors reflected their hypotheses about the language they were learning. This is a claim that continues to be held widely to date. Thus, instruction or corrective feedback cannot alter the path of language learning. However, research has shown that they can accelerate learners' movement and progress along the path, if provided at a time that is developmentally appropriate.

When helping students to form English sentences, therefore, what must be kept in mind is that rules of sentence grammar are acquired in an order of increasing complexity, with simple statements emerging before questions, and copular yes–no questions before lexical yes–no questions, and these, in turn, prior to wh-questions (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; Ellis, 1994). If this is not the order of instruction in student textbooks, therefore, students cannot be expected to be ready to internalize sentence grammar with strict accuracy (Meisel et al., 1981; Ellis, 1989; see also Pienemann, 1984; Lightbown and Spada, 1993). The best that teachers can hope for is that students have been alerted to the more complex structures so that they can begin to recognize them. However, the students cannot be expected to use these complex structures correctly until they have gained at least some control over the simpler ones.

5.4. Awareness

Learners appear to respond better to corrective feedback when they are aware that they are being corrected. This is not always possible in the height of a communicative activity, but hearing a corrected version immediately following what learners have

just said helps them 'notice the gap' between their production and the correct L2 version (Schmidt and Frota, 1986; Schmidt, 1990, 1992; Doughty and Varela, 1998). In one of these studies, for example, it was found that students whose teacher provided immediate corrective feedback on the particular error of substitution of *have* for *be*, as it arose during communicative activities, were able to overcome the error and sustain correct production well beyond their period of instruction. However, those students who were corrected during audiolingual drill and practice activities were able to self-correct, but could not sustain such correction beyond the classroom (Lightbown, 1991).

A similar finding has held for Chinese language learning by native English speakers who were studying measure words and were given one of several different correction strategies whenever they expressed an error. These strategies included suppliance of models, provision of metalinguistic information and rules, comments, and explicit rejection. The only significant effects on production were shown for models and metalinguistic information. Simply informing students when they were wrong, or leaving the error unattended, to develop into a target feature on its own, was shown to be far less effective than these more directly instructional techniques (see Chen, 1996, for more details; Lightbown and Spada, 1993, for review of related studies).

5.5. *Integration*

Effective activities for grammar learning integrate instruction with correction. An innovative practice, which has been implemented experimentally in foreign language classrooms, is the 'garden path' approach. This technique relies on traditional methods of sequenced rule teaching and corrective feedback. It also includes newer views of SLA that focus on learners' attention on relationships of L2 forms and features and awareness of language structures. Research has shown that learners who participated in the garden path technique of sequencing instruction on grammar rules and exceptions were more successful at learning the rules than those who were taught rules and exceptions at the same time.

In one study on the garden path technique, for example, learners were first taught only regular forms of verb structures. Then they practiced on exercises for both regular and irregular structures. This activity led them to produce typical errors of overgeneralization as they applied the rule for regular verbs to irregular verbs. The teacher then gave immediate feedback on their errors, followed by instruction on the exception. This feedback called the students' attention to the difference between regular and irregular verbs in ways that instruction alone had been less effective in doing. As a result, students were able to make more rapid progress in their verb learning (see Tomasello and Herron 1988, 1989, for further details).

5.6. *Extension*

Instruction and correction can be effective in guiding learners to acquire sociolinguistic rules. Of particular importance are those rules whose accuracy and appropriateness are highly dependent on context and on perceived interlocutor roles

and relationships for their application. Recent studies have shown that instruction on social rules and formulas makes a difference to the rate and extent to which they are learned (Swain and Lapkin, 1989; Billmyer, 1990; Olshtain and Cohen, 1990; Lyster, 1994). Also important to their growth is the opportunity to learn cultural information, which may be difficult to obtain in classroom input. It seems likely that role plays are helpful for communication, but they are not sufficient for learners to gain access to the norms of the native speakers. They may develop their own interpretation of these rules if left to their own devices.

Many teachers who are not native speakers of the language they are teaching are reluctant to teach sociolinguistic dimensions of the L2. The strategies noted throughout this section, with their emphasis on the cognitive dimensions of learning, might allay some such teachers' fears. Since sociolinguistic rules are generally so complex and difficult that a good deal of explanation and example is needed, teachers need not feel that they must be native-like in their use of such rules in order to be a resource for their students. In addition, these more cognitive activities may be particularly attractive, as growing numbers of learners reject games and even discussion as too easy and informal to meet their expectations (Futaba, 1994).

Many of these strategies have as much to do with SLA as they do with communication. For example, learners need additional help with questions, especially confirmation checks and clarification requests. Such strategic moves as "Did you say X?" or "Could you say that again?" are effective ways of helping learners to have messages repeated and adjusted for comprehensibility. Research has shown that these useful strategies can be taught to students quite effectively, even when the instruction is provided by non-native speaker teachers (e.g. Dornyei, 1995). The challenge to the teacher is centered both on the teaching and learning of the strategies as well as on creating a classroom environment where such strategies are welcome (see Pica, 1987).

As the need for direct instruction and corrective feedback continues to grow, along with evidence that both are effective when used in a principled way, there has been an emerging re-conceptualization of the relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves in the classroom. As will be discussed in the next section, one consistent finding is that again, a principled approach to choosing and implementing these participation structures is critical for success in English learning.

6. Participant choices

Most teachers would agree that there is a need for communication that balances teacher-led instruction with group work and learner-to-learner, or peer, interaction. This observation has become even more important in light of a large and growing accumulation of research findings over the past 20 years. Strengths and weaknesses have been identified.

First, it has been observed that communication with peers promotes authentic, purposeful L2 use. Research has revealed that peer work enables students to use

language more communicatively and across a broader range of functions than do lessons characterized by lock-step, teacher-led classroom interaction (Long et al., 1976). Learners are particularly helpful in using a technique known as scaffolding. This is observed as students work in pairs. One will complete the other's utterance when the other is struggling to find a word or expression to communicate a message (Pica et al., 1996), as well as in supporting each other's answers even during teacher-fronted lessons (Tseng, 1992).

It has also been shown that peer communication activities are particularly effective in the short term, in that when working in pairs on a communication task, learners rarely incorporate each other's errors into their own production. Far more prevalent are learners' self-corrections and modification of their own utterances into more complex forms (Pica et al., 1996), their self-generated adjustments toward more correct production (Bruton and Samuda, 1980) and their incorporation of each other's correct productions (Gass and Varonis, 1990). Thus, in the immediate term, peer and group work do not handicap correct production, indeed they can greatly assist it. However, when looking at long-range goals for learners, peer and group activities appear to be less effective in that regard, particularly for mastery of grammar and pronunciation. This will be discussed below.

Thus, research has also revealed that peer communication activities are not sufficient for meeting learner goals as far as L2 mastery is concerned. In the long run, students who engage in extensive student-to-student interaction, without the benefit of much direct interaction with their teacher, have been found to develop fluent, but non-target like production. This is largely because the input they receive from peer learners reinforces their own errors and misanalyses of the target language (Plann, 1977; Lightbown and Spada, 1990; White, 1990; Wong Fillmore, 1992).

Further, not all students working with peers have been found to take advantage of the opportunity to speak. In fact, they are often prevented from doing so by more assertive group members (Pica and Doughty, 1985). In addition, group work has been found to assist certain language skills more than others. Listening comprehension, in particular, appears to be facilitated in that regard (see Bejarano, 1987 and Pica, 1991, for further details). Such findings suggest that additional decisions beyond those involving learner and teacher participation patterns are required to insure language proficiency.

7. Activities and tasks

There are several classroom tasks that are particularly effective in differentially involving teachers and learners to focus on features of L2 grammar. Most are reminiscent of traditional activities such as grammar exercises, dictation, and recitation, and thus integrate traditional concerns for grammar instruction with the communicative technique of group work. However, their emphasis on goal and on the necessity to manipulate and apply specific L2 features to reach that goal make them more than simply the L2-using activities typical to communicative methods.

7.1. Grammar decision making

In grammar decision-making tasks, actual grammar exercises are given to students to work out together and report to their classmates. Small groups of students or student pairs might be asked to complete fill-in or multiple-choice exercises, by selecting among verb tense or aspectual features, for example, and then explain their choices to their teacher, to each other, and to other classmates. Research has shown that such tasks are very simple to locate, adapt, or devise, and yet can have powerful impact on students' grammar learning over time (Fotos and Ellis, 1991).

7.2. Information exchange

Known popularly as jig-saw tasks, these communication activities are characterized by a format that adheres to the following two conditions. Each student is given a portion of the information needed to carry out the task, and is required to exchange this information with the other students in order to complete the task successfully (see Doughty and Pica, 1986, and Pica et al., 1993, for reviews). Such tasks thus provide a potential context for learners to focus their attention on the form and meaning of the messages, as message providers and as message comprehenders.

There are two main types of these information exchange tasks that have had successful applications in laboratory settings. One task involves communication through visual description, the other involves communication through story telling. In a description task, learners are asked to draw or describe pictures or other visuals, such as maps, diagrams, and charts, and describe them to peers who themselves must draw, assemble, or manipulate them on the basis of the learner's verbal description.

In a picture story task, learners must compose a single story by exchanging information on their own individually held pictures of the story, the full sequence of which is kept hidden from their view until the end of the task. After they have assembled the pictures in a way that they believe reflects the story, they are allowed to see the hidden sequence of pictures, and judge their success.

One story that has been used successfully in both research and classroom contexts, consists of pictures depicting a woman who was getting ready to begin cooking at her gas stove. She had turned on the gas and was about to light a match to ignite the gas, when she was interrupted by a surprise visitor. She then proceeded to answer her door and sat down to a conversation with an unexpected guest. However, in so doing, she forgot to turn off the stove. When the guest lit a cigarette, this was followed by a small explosion in the woman's home. This example reveals how story narratives lend themselves to contrasts in time and activity as well as foregrounding and backgrounding of information, thereby drawing learners' attention to verb forms as they try to work out the story together.

Each of these types of information exchange tasks, with their different grammatical emphases enables students to produce a broad range of input, feedback, and output modifications during their exchange of information. The visual description

task engages learners in describing attributes, states and conditions in their pictures. Such description guides them to focus on the names and features of objects, individuals, and contexts. The story telling task, on the other hand, with its emphasis on a sequence of events, leads them to focus on verb inflections for actions and experiences, with reference to time sequences and foreground–background relationships among the story events.

7.3. Dictogloss and dictocomp

The dictogloss and dictocomp resemble traditional lecture/text reading, presentation and dictation exercises, but build on them in the following ways. First, the teacher provides a lecture or brief passage that has been adapted to emphasize a particular structure or structure contrast, e.g. verb tenses, noun number or question construction. This structure can be pointed out to the students before they undertake the task. During the dictation or text reading, students take notes on an individual basis, then work in teams, using their notes to reconstruct the text for a follow up presentation in oral or written form.

Further discussion of these tasks can be found in Nunan (1989), Swain (1993), and Wajnryb (1990). Their publications have highlighted learner exchanges on these tasks. As students work through dictogloss and dictocomp tasks, they discuss grammatical features as well as rules for accuracy. This is especially so when after the reconstruction, the groups get together to compare versions with each other and with the original version given them by their teacher. The dictogloss and dictocomp are of particular interest in bringing together the traditional and transitional dimensions of language teaching methodology. This is because they strike a balance between the more traditional teacher-led instruction and the sorts of group work that have been promoted in communicative approaches.

As concerns for achieving a balance between teacher-led instruction and peer work continue to mount in language teaching methodology, there is also renewed interest in the contributions teachers can make toward using students' NL to guide their learning. This will be addressed in the following section.

8. NL resources

Research on the discourse of foreign language classrooms has revealed teachers' use of students' NL or other languages shared with them. Such use has been found to be primarily for management purposes to clarify directions to assignments and to point out and explain student errors (Sticchi-Damiani, 1983; Polio and Duff, 1994), to facilitate student clarification requests and to answer their questions about complex sociolinguistic rules, and to prepare them to apply their knowledge and experience to an assignment. Two additional contributions of NL use come from the socio-affective sphere, as teachers' and students' L2 use has been found to assist rapport building exchanges with teachers and peers, and to reduce anxiety among students in their emotional struggles with L2 learning and communication.

It is important to note that research does not suggest a return to translation as an all-encompassing strategy for language teaching, although a recent article by Malmkjaer (1997), suggests a rationale for its use in the classroom. Further, research on NL use suggests it does not play a central role in promoting learners' access to comprehensible L2 input and corrective feedback and their production of modified output. In addition, NL use does not directly prepare learners to communicate with language users who do not know their NL, for which they must rely on L2 almost exclusively. With the spread of English, this need is growing increasingly acute.

9. Conclusion

A number of fresh and original approaches to instruction have emerged in recent years. A good deal of their conceptualization and implementation is based on traditions that have sustained the field of language teaching methodology since its inception, as well as on theory and research drawn from the field of SLA. Recent findings on the cognitive, social, and linguistic processes of L2 learning have suggested a principled approach to L2 instruction. Such principles are characterized by classroom strategies, participant structures, and activities which incorporate traditional approaches, and reconcile them with communicative practices. More principles may very well emerge, given the openness of the fields of teaching methodology and SLA to explore and explain classroom processes, and their willingness to critique and question their roles and relationships in this endeavor. Further challenges will arise to meet the needs of English language learners, as they aim toward higher levels of L2 proficiency and a broader application of their English L2 skills.

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