

News and Views on TESOL at the Start of the 21st Century

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Abstract: Teachers of English as a Foreign Language can often feel out of touch with developments in TESOL in native English speaking countries. Information about developments may arrive in sporadically, in discontinuous spurts, and they may not be sure about the accuracy of the picture they are getting, or about how they should be teaching. This paper is a personal attempt to trace important developments and issues in TESOL over the last 25 years, and to suggest ways in which these can affect the performance of the classroom EFL teacher. A number of important recent developments and issues discussed here, including the analysis of language (particularly in ESP) and the teaching of grammar, task-based learning, second language acquisition, and Critical Pedagogy.

Key words: TESOL, EFL, task-based learning, methods

I was last in Indonesia four presidents ago, as a colleague of mine put it. When I look back on those days teaching in the English Department at Universitas Brawijaya, a young teacher with more enthusiasm than skill, I am struck by the differences between the world of English teaching then and the world of English teaching now. In those days our main methodology was audiolingualism, and the language laboratory was a hallowed place, not the least because it was the only classroom that was air-conditioned. We used R.L. Alexander's *New Concept English*, and I remember how much I learned from both my colleagues and my students

about cross-cultural issues and about teaching advanced, sophisticated learners, an interest which has stayed with me throughout my years in ELT.

I would like to explore some of these changes and for some of them examine what they might mean for the classroom teacher. To do so, I will use the framework provided by Bell (1981):

Views of language

Views of how we believe people learn languages

Views of how we can help people to learn languages

VIEWS OF LANGUAGE

This is probably the most profound change since the 1970's, and it permeates every aspect of modern language teaching. In the 1970's we were still bound by the view from linguistics that language was an abstract system, consisting of rules for listing the elements of a sentence and specifying their permitted combinations, and to a lesser extent, rules for assigning meaning to units permitted by the syntax. There was little attention paid to the relationship of language to social behaviour, little consideration of what we use language for, what we use it to do. Halliday (1985) talks about three levels at which language works: the textual (how to form), the ideational (how to mean) and the interpersonal (how to use - in a culturally and socially appropriate manner). In Halliday's terms, the grammar-translation method, and to a large extent audiolingualism, ignored the interpersonal and ideational.

In the late 1970's, with the Notional-Functional Syllabus and the advent of the Communicative Approach to teaching, the view we had of language became *functional* rather than *formal* in orientation. Nowadays, then, as well as teaching language as a form or code, we concern ourselves with the communication of meaning, in forms appropriate to the social context and the situation. Language is seen as a system of communication that is used by real people for performing everyday tasks. Another development is that as teachers, we also need to be concerned with language at the clause level, at sentence level and at the text level, through the organisation and linking of ideas (such as through cohesion). We need to be concerned with discourse, how sentences combine to form a text and the combinations of grammatical and vocabulary feature that characterize

different genres.

The concept of genre has developed from work done by Halliday (1985) and Swales (1990). Genre is a text-type that has developed in response to a social or professional need. It generally has a predictable structure (examples include school essays, personal letters, newspaper articles, and academic lectures). Generally, genres are highly structured and conventionalized and there are constraints on what is allowable in terms of communicative purpose, positioning, form and functional value (Bhatia 1993).

Another consideration is that language has important mental functions. Our experience of language in social settings leads us to categorize the world in similar ways to people around us and to manipulate these categories in our thinking. This is a cognitive aspect of language learning, important for both EFL and ESL learners because their encounter with a new language requires them to cope with new categories of experience and new ways of manipulating them. We need to make our lessons interesting and cognitively challenging for students, in order to maintain their motivation.

A significant change that this view of language has instigated in the classroom is the use of language in communicative tasks to exchange meaning. Another is the use of authentic materials (materials not designed for language teaching). Modern materials focus on the 'real-world' use of language in terms of task, context, topic and roles of people involved. Of course, it is generally not feasible to use only authentic materials in the EFL classroom (this is difficult for example with beginners), but it is important to use them, as they have valuable motivational benefits. Even tasks such as replying to agony aunt sections of newspapers or magazines (where readers write in asking for advice with their problems) can work in this respect. Authentic materials assist in developing the flexibility of real life use, they erode the artificiality of classroom communication, and, as long as the students participate, they present a chance for students to fully engage with the content and thus the language. Personalizing activities, such as making the students talk about themselves in English, as well as being an authentic use of the language, is also motivating. Students should be allowed to create their own identity in English, to feel at home'' with the language. This can only be done if they are allowed to use it.

Orton (1990) argues that in an EFL context, where students have no actual communicative needs in the in English, in order to create an environment in which English can be presented as a real language, there is a need to create a virtual world inside the classroom. This virtual world cannot be created without the active collaboration of the students. Having a classroom devoted to English, with posters from Native English Speaking (NES) countries, and grammar and vocabulary charts to decorate the walls, and easy access to reference materials such as dictionaries, grammar books, English magazines, newspapers and readers, computers with Internet access, and language games that learners can play during break times can be a great help in creating this virtual world. Such classrooms can be seen in many secondary schools in Thailand, and are instrumental in promoting a positive attitude towards English, where the meta-task of creating and maintaining the world of the target language in a classroom context that is otherwise monolingual and monocultural.

English for Specific Purposes

Another major development resulting from the paradigm shift in view of language has been the blossoming of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Business. The ESP movement brought, along with a greater sensitivity to the social and functional qualities of language, the practice of analysing language used in the target situation, and the concept of both learning needs and target situation needs. This is, of course, known as needs analysis, and is the starting point for developing an ESP syllabus. With language analysis, there is a concern with finding out what language is used in real life contexts as opposed to what we imagine is used. By collecting authentic texts (spoken or written), and subjecting these texts to analysis, a course has a basis for the language syllabus, and teachers can be confident that they are preparing their learners for the things they need to be able to know or do in order to function effectively in the target situation.

More recently in ESP, there have been major developments in the area of genre analysis. Interestingly, recent research in EAP shows that different disciplines create and transmit knowledge differently, and the conventions of a certain discipline shape texts in a particular way. Each

discipline offers a different system for examining experience, a different angle for looking at subject matter, a different kind of thinking. Teaching the content of a subject is different to teaching how to write in that discipline. This presents a number of challenges to those who work, for example, teaching English for Business, or Commerce, or Science. Such teachers may not have enough knowledge of the underlying conventions of a discipline to be able to teach the language of specific subject areas effectively. ESP scholars suggest the only way to overcome this problem is for teachers to show an interest in the discipline, be willing to familiarize themselves with the language of the students' subject, and obtain a working knowledge of the language and thus some of the concepts behind it. This includes familiarizing themselves with the course materials, and consulting the subject teacher if necessary. Working with subject teachers, especially through team teaching, is highly recommended (Jordan, 1997, Dudley-Evans 1998, 2001).

Corpus-based Materials

Another factor that has had a major influence our views of language is computer-based technology, particularly the use of corpus-based material in the classroom (Fox 1998, Cobb and Horst 20001). Corpus based materials are claimed to have a number of benefits. First, they allow students to see typical contexts and co-texts of the words (i.e. the situational and linguistic environments in which they are commonly used). In seeing these co-texts, they allow the learner to meet the target work a number of times. Researchers in the area of vocabulary, such as Coxhead and Nation (2001), claim that it takes at least five encounters with a word in natural context for that word to be remembered. Second, corpus-based materials provide language as it is used in real life, as opposed to the manufactured examples found in grammar books or course books. For example, despite what grammar books tell us, there are more than four conditionals found in English, and more than four ways of reporting speech. Third, corpus-based materials can give students a clear idea about collocations (words that are commonly found in close proximity), thus allowing the learners to sound more 'native-like'. This is especially important for verbs which are followed by certain adverbs or prepositional phrases. Fourth, corpus based materials can demonstrate pragmatic

features, such as meanings and effects which come from the use of language in particular situations

eg. Concordance lines for 'a doddle' after Fox (1998:34)

civil war would be much easier, be almost a doddle. The really bad thing laughter # the Italy's mismanaged economy will be a doddle compared with cutting out the rot in the political And you've got two weeks. It should be a doddle for you. You're frightfully good at this sort of that their product makes housework a doddle. Every other bathroom cleaner manufacturer our first checkpoint. This seemed such a doddle that we even contemplated a few drinks in the for those who think black runs are a doddle, there's always heli-skiing – where a helicopter but crazy. It was not a challenge at all. It was a doddle compared with the next day's stage to Osolaof a luxury. Grammar, in short is a doddle, and there is no longer any need to call it,¹

VIEWS OF HOW LANGUAGE IS LEARNED

In the audiolingual era, it was believed that all learning was the formation of habits, through stimulus-response-feedback patterns. It was believed that language was learned through imitation, mimicry, and constant practice, so that new language habits became fixed. Students were not encouraged to venture into the wild world of 'free' or unstructured discourse in case they encounter errors, which would prevent the development of correct habits. There was little attention to meaning, and little cognitive challenge in the application of rules.

However, the behaviourist philosophy of audiolingualism was challenged by Chomsky (1959). Further, from studies in the 1960's-1970's of how children acquired language in natural settings, it emerged that language learning is not a process of forming habits, but a process of creative construction, and that what children know about language structure could not have been learned from the data available to them through the talk of parents, siblings, and caretakers. Children were shown to have the capacity to respond to new situations for which stimulus-response habits alone can

not prepare them. By concentrating on the mental system which underlies the use of language, researchers were able to show that even from a very early age, children develop this system for themselves by using their own powers of observation and generalization in order to make sense of the language they experience. Furthermore, children pass through certain developmental stages in the acquisition of sounds and syntax, regardless of the individual and the learning context. Work in child language acquisition developed into studies in adult language acquisition in the 1970's, and the field of enquiry now known as Second Language Acquisition (SLA) emerged.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Since the mid 1970's, researchers, such as Krashen (1982), have looked for evidence of a developmental sequence in second or foreign language learning. SLA findings have presented strong evidence that even classroom learners have a natural 'inbuilt syllabus' (Corder, 1981), and are inclined to follow this rather than external syllabus devised by teacher. In the early days of SLA, researchers believed this had major implications for the teaching of grammar, and the correction of errors. Some researchers debated whether it was worth teaching grammar at all. Errors were seen as a natural part of the language learning process and not evidence of poor learning or laziness. More recently Pienemann (1985, 1988, 1998), discussed below, has continued this area of research. The consequence of this research was a decline in the teaching of grammar and the correction of errors. As research suggested that all learners pass through fairly similar stages whether they are instructed in grammar or not, writers such as Krashen (1982) believed all teachers needed to do was to provide learners with comprehensible input (texts of a difficulty level just a little above that of the learners). Such an approach was extremely influential in the 1980's in northern America. It was believed that the overt teaching of language form or grammar and the correction of students' errors was at best a waste of time, and at worst harmful (Lightbown 2000:435)².

However, Swain's (1985) study of French immersion students in

² It is important to realise that British applied linguists and language teachers did not share these views, and were more concerned with teaching language in context, language in use, language for a purpose, in short, real language rather than contrived examples of grammatical rules.

¹ A 'doddle' is informal British English for something that is easy to do.

Canada, showed that input alone is not enough to develop learners' language. Output (getting learners to produce language through speaking or writing) is essential for acquisition, and learners must be 'pushed' to reshape incorrect or badly-formed utterances and to use the Target Language (TL) more coherently and accurately. Swain's study suggested a role for the teaching of grammar and the importance of corrective feedback.

The consequences of Krashen-type approaches for EFL learners are particularly problematic, as outlined by Fotos (1998). Fotos supports the view that EFL teachers have long held: that grammar teaching is essential in foreign language classrooms because lack of exposure to English outside the classroom means learners have limited exposure to input in comparison to Second language learning contexts in NES countries. Fotos' review of SLA research on the effects of grammar teaching (or form-focussed instruction) shows that most research has been conducted in an ESL context, and is either one of two activity types. The first is implicit grammar instruction, based on the assumption that learners should be able to notice, then process, linguistic structures which have been introduced to them within purely communicative contexts, such as by structured input which floods them with the target structure, or which highlights the target structure. The second activity type is explicit grammar instruction followed by communicative activities, then teacher-led review of the target grammar form and correction of errors. Both forms are based on that assumption that after awareness of the grammatical structures has been developed, learners will notice the target structures in subsequent communicative input. This noticing of the target structure is believed to promote the restructuring of learners' internal linguistic system and thus facilitate acquisition of that structure.

However, the first activity type assumes the learners will be able to encounter the target grammatical forms frequently, not only in their language classrooms, but in their daily life as well. Such repeated encounters are necessary to reinforce the grammar treatment. But this assumption is not valid for the EFL situation. Implicit grammar instruction is not applicable to EFL situations because learners lack opportunities for communicative use of English outside the classroom. Thus the second activity type is more appropriate to FL situations, especially reading-based

grammar-type activities. A review of classroom and laboratory research on the effects of form-focussed instruction in SLA by Spada (1997) also supports the view that the grammar instruction, whether implicit or explicit, is beneficial to language development. Learners, especially young learners, can benefit from explicit grammar teaching when it is contextualised in meaningful communicative practice, when explicit instruction is given and when corrective feedback is given. Research, however, does not show what how corrective feedback or explicit instruction should be given.

In the 1980's, Johnston (1986) and Pienemann et al (1988, 1989, 1998) showed that learners acquire linguistic features (grammatical structures, such as word order and some grammatical morphemes) in a predictable developmental sequence, and that though learners' progress through the sequence can be speeded up by explicit teaching of grammatical structures, the sequence learners follow is not altered significantly by instruction. These findings would seem to suggest that teaching a new language structure is only effective if it reflects the stage just beyond the learner's current stage. If not, teaching and practice are not effective, and may even be detrimental. However, the implications of this 'teachability hypothesis' for teaching are not completely clear. There has been considerable criticism of Pienemann et al's studies (see Ellis 1995), and there has been little research to show how the hypothesis may be implemented in the classroom. Lightbown (2000), among others, says it is neither feasible nor desirable. Certainly, few coursebooks have taken up challenge to rearrange their presentation of language items to correspond to the order found by Pienemann et al.

SLA, then, emerged as a field of enquiry in its own right in the mid 1970's, though it has not been without its critics. In particular, up till recent times, it has not attempted to answer pedagogical concerns of teachers (Lightbown 1985, Ellis 1997, McCarthy 2001), but has nonetheless had a role in limiting unrealistic expectations for what language learners and teachers can accomplish in the TESOL classroom (Lightbown 2001). Some researchers have criticised SLA for not taking the context of language learning into account and for being individualistic, and asocial in orientation (Larsen-Freeman 2000). Others have attacked SLA's view of the learner as an idealized, autonomous language acquirer

(Pennycook 1997), and have questioned the focus of most SLA researchers on morpho-syntactic features of language and not pragmatic and semantic features, such as the placement of topic and comment in a sentence. In fact, the focus on morpho-syntax suggests that the underlying orientation of many SLA researchers towards language is that language is an abstract system.

The Cognitivist View

Currently, an influential view of how language, particularly the grammatical system, is learned is the *cognitivist view* (Littlewood 1992, Skehan 1998, Schmidt 1990, Rutherford 1987, Loschky and Bley-Vroman 1993). According to this model, we communicate in two main ways. One is through fixed language items, such as single words or fixed phrases (eg. *Yes. Sure. I know what you mean.*), known as *exemplars*. Exemplars are a vocabulary-based mode of ready-made units or formulaic utterances (such as *how are you?* or *to tell you the truth*) which can be accessed quickly under time pressure. This mode of communication relies on a large storage area, is well organised, and has a very rapid memory system for accessing. It is very important for developing fluency. The second mode is communication through the language system the use of morphemes and syntax to express meanings. It relies on grammar, which after all carries a significant part of the meaning we wish to express, and planning and is known as the *rule-based mode*. It is primarily used when there is no time pressure, or there is a need to be exact, accurate or creative. Using this mode, we liberate language from the physical context in which it is made, and the concrete time when it is made (the 'here and now'), and are able to talk about the past, and speculate about the future. In conversation, we can switch between exemplars and the rule-based mode according to relative importance of processing demands. However, both modes must be developed in learners.

This model assumes the goals of language learners are, to paraphrase Skehan (1998), to become more native-like in their performance. Skehan breaks this process down into development in three target areas: *fluency* (the capacity to mobilise knowledge of the language to communicate meanings in real time), *accuracy* (the ability of the learner to perform in accordance with target language norms), and *complexity* or *restructuring*

(the utilization of language structures that are, for the learner, 'cutting edge', elaborate, and structured). However, we can't expect that learners can meet these three goals simultaneously: there is not sufficient processing capacity in the brain for this to happen. We are simply unable to focus our attention on all three aspects (or even two aspects) at once, and for language learning to occur efficiently we need to give the learners opportunities to develop in all of these areas individually.

Fluency, when language produced faster with fewer hesitations, relies on language items being accessible, and requires learners to draw on memory-based system of exemplars. If the learner is focusing on fluency, then accuracy and complexity are generally given lower priority. If the learner is focusing on accuracy, their speech will tend to be slower and consume a large portion of attention because of the utilization of the rule-based system. Consequently, there is less likelihood that new forms will be incorporated into the learner's language (i.e. restructuring). The same applies if the learner is focusing on complexity or restructuring. Complexity or restructuring promotes the taking of risks, and there is a need for the learner's attention to be directed towards the new language forms. According to the cognitivist model, learning is cumulative, suggesting we should use a cycles that encourages restructuring, followed by activities that emphasise accuracy and then fluency, followed by cycles that develop further restructuring etc.

The development of the grammatical system in this model is believed to involve two processes: automatization and restructuring. *Automatization* is a learned response built up through consistent mapping of the same input to the same pattern of activation over many occasions. Automatization is fairly permanent, executed quickly with relatively little effort, and associated with repeated practice of a given language structure (including drills and pen-and-paper exercises). *Restructuring* is the learning of more accurate 'cutting edge' structures which are more native-like in their formation. Restructuring accounts for sudden movements of insight experienced by learners. It is governed by inferencing and hypothesis testing, such as the relationship between given structure and its function. It occurs usually as a result of learner noticing a gap in own representation of this relationship.

The cognitivist view has important implications for language

learning and teaching: The exemplar mode and the concept of automatization provide a role for the memorisation of chunks of language items, including single words, social ritual formulae (eg *I'm fine thank you*), and phrases where one slot can be filled. For example, *please give me coffee* can be reformulated as *please give me tea/soda/orange juice* or, *please give him tea*. Memorisation can, conceivably, be assisted by drills and pattern practice, though few scholars would recommend sole use of these audiolingual techniques. Automatization also applies to phonology, or pronunciation, and the production of syntax. However, the approach also emphasises the importance for learners of practicing both part skills (e.g. a particular structure, phonological feature, social formula) and also whole tasks (i.e. communicative activities).

The Sociocultural Perspective

More recently, the Sociocultural Perspective (Appel and Lantolf 1994) has come to prominence. This perspective draws on the work of Vygotsky (1986) and Leont'ev (1981) claiming that in communication we always co-construct the activities in which we engage, in accordance with our own backgrounds, status, and locally determined goals. Rather than viewing the learner as a 'lone receptor' (as in the cognitivist perspective), this perspective sees learning as a social process, constructed by the learner with the teacher and his/her peers, where performance depends on the interaction of the individual and task rather than on the inherent properties of the task itself (Appel and Lantolf 1994). Learning arises not *through* interaction but *in* interaction. In this approach, it is impossible to predict with certainty what kind of language performance will result from specific tasks. This suggests we cannot design a task-based syllabus based on negotiation of meaning, fluency, accuracy, and complexity because there is no basis for selecting/grading tasks. It also implies that the same task can result in very different kinds of activity when performed by the same learners at different times. This is a new approach, and its implications for teaching are still under research.

HOW WE CAN HELP PEOPLE TO LEARN LANGUAGES

For a very considerable time, the language teaching profession has been engaged in the search for the best method to teach a language. Over the last 25 years there has been a growing acceptance that this is a fruitless search. There can be no one best method, given the diversity of teachers, learners, and learning purposes, and contexts. Prabhu (1990), in an important paper, argues that what is more important is good teaching by individuals, where there is a sense of involvement by the teacher rather than mechanical teaching, which can result from an over-routinisation of teaching activities. Prabhu characterises good teaching as the engagement of teachers' 'sense of plausibility', when teachers operate with some personal conception of how their teaching leads to desired learning, with an idea of causation which has a measure of credibility for them. Their conceptualisation may come from past experience as a learner, earlier experience of teaching, exposure to other methods in teacher training, knowledge and/or opinions of other teachers actions, or their experience as a parent or caregiver.

Communicative Language Teaching

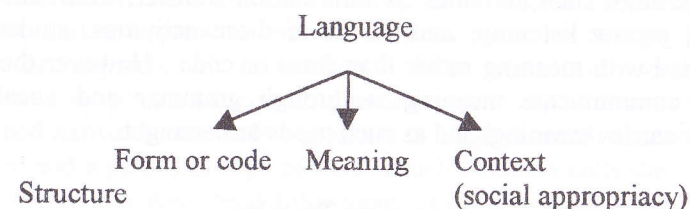
The dominant approach to methodology over the last 25 years has been Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), an approach which developed from, among other things, changes in the way that language was viewed, and the humanistic methods (Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, The Silent Way and Community Language Learning), which placed a greater focus on the learner and the process of learning, motivation, and the learner's emotional state during the language learning process. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983, in Richards 1998:40) provide a useful summary of the characteristics of the Communicative approach, and the approach itself has been widely written about. However, the fact remains that the approach is complex and multi-faced, and misunderstandings about what it advocates are persistent (Thompson 1986, Mullock 2000). Nunan (1989:12) claims that CLT, rather than being one approach, is actually 'a family of approaches, each member of which claims to be "communicative"', and that it is difficult to find approaches which claim not to be communicative. The Communicative Approach has, rather like English

in non-English speaking countries, become associated with modernity and all kinds of strange methodological practices which do not conform to any of the characteristics listed by Richards can be found which claim to be 'communicative'. More controversially, Pennycook (1989) argues there are so many conflicting views about what Communicative Language Teaching is (as with most other methods) that it is hard to find much agreement at all amongst scholars about what CLT really is

The influence of CLT is visible in the fact that language teaching now focuses more on the learner, through such practices as needs analysis (analysing the needs of the learner to determine what language content is to be taught, and what types of pedagogical tasks are required), consideration of learner differences at an individual level, and learner training (training learners how to learn a language more effectively, especially outside the language classroom). Another influence is the expectation that learners will develop the skill of understanding messages in contexts where they only partly understand what they hear/see, and need to be prepared to take the risk of making an error. The attitude towards errors, of course, is not punitive, and errors are regarded as a natural part of learning.

An important historical fact to bear in mind about CLT is that it developed from teachers' observations of the English skills of overseas students in both the UK and the USA. These students would come with grammatical accuracy on paper, but were unable to orally communicate effectively or appropriately. However, this early concern with oral language, especially fluent oral language, has been much criticised, as has its purported lack of concern for the teaching of grammar.

While the Communicative Approach incorporates a view of language that is less narrowly syntactic in nature than Traditional views of language (which were based on structuralism and transformational generative grammar), its view of language as more semantic, more social, and more communicative has often been interpreted (wrongly) as neglecting the teaching of grammar. Language, from the point of view of the Communicative Approach is seen as comprising three aspects:



Being able to communicate appropriately or successfully on all these levels is known as communicative competence. All native speakers of a language have this communicative competence in their own L1. However, there is an important point here. All of these levels are important, but if we concentrate only on the form or the grammar we may miss the other two aspects. Concentration on the form is what is predominantly done in traditional methods, especially in EFL contexts, because grammar is something that can be 'taught' like other subjects. This commonly results in teaching about the language rather than teaching the language.

Context in language teaching is being able to use language appropriately in a particular social context, but is an aspect that is overlooked in much EFL teaching. Context is what is being taught in functions and notions, knowing how to get something done in the real world, such as asking someone to open the window politely. Do we say 'Open the window' or 'Could you open the window, please?' or 'It's a bit stuffy in here, don't you think?' or 'How do I get the window to open?' The choice depends on the social context and the relationship between the speakers. Social appropriacy had traditionally been neglected in much language teaching, and the realisation of the importance of this aspect of language was one of the major forces behind CLT.

Finally, let us consider meaning. In normal day to day interactions, the main thing we concentrate on in any language is the meaning, the message. If we talk to someone, read a newspaper, listen to the news on the radio, take part in a discussion, write a letter, our attention is focused on the message, not on the formal linguistic properties of the text. (unless we are linguists or novelists). In CLT, there is an attempt to copy this normal language use, this natural tendency to focus on the meaning. This

is done through such activities as information transfer, information gap activities, jigsaw listening, and in all of these activities, students are preoccupied with meaning rather than form or code. However the major way we communicate meaning is through grammar and vocabulary. Grammar carries meaning, and as such needs to be taught.

Criticisms of Communicative Language Teaching

Since the late 1970's there have been a number of criticisms of the Communicative Approach. These include its focus on oral activities and neglect of accuracy activities, especially grammar; difficulties in implementing it in large classes and with beginners; and a lack of focus resulting from practising a large number of skills at a time. For ELF teachers who are non-native speakers of English, an important criticism is that it may expect too much from the teacher, as lessons tend to be less predictable; teachers have to be ready to listen to what learners say (not just how they say it); teachers must be ready to interact with learners in as natural a way as possible (which is difficult if they have low levels of proficiency in English); and teachers need a wider range of management skills than in traditional classes (such as being able to set up pair/group work, organise and get feedback from discussion groups etc) (Thompson 1996). Two other major difficulties relate to institutional factors (such as resources, and physical and acoustic conditions in a particular institution) and educational factors (such as examination systems and the need to cover the syllabus) (Mullock 2000)

A useful critique of CLT for our purposes is provided by Holliday (1994b). He claims the Communicative Approach has become the cornerstone of teacher education programs and ELT aid projects in developing countries. However, the outcome from aid projects attempting to implement the Communicative Approach internationally has been a high incidence of cases of failure and anxiety:

'Teachers return from training programs unable to implement what they have learnt, because it does not fit the conditions, needs and philosophies of their classrooms, students, institutions, and communities.' (Holliday 1994b:2).

He argues this is because TESOL has developed from a very narrow base within a limited social context. This context is the found in countries of

Britain, Australasia, the USA and Canada (Native English Speaking or NES countries), and it applies to mainly adult teaching, to private language schools, or adjuncts of universities. These classroom contexts are characterised by pleasant facilities, plentiful resources, motivated students, well-trained native or near native speakers of English, small classes (15-20) and so on, and a particular type of CLT, which Holliday calls the 'weak' or 'popular' view, has developed from them. CLT obviously works well in NES contexts for which it was designed, but the implicit claim that this weak view of CLT is suitable for all contexts needs to be examined.

In particular it needs to be examined within the contexts of the state-oriented system of tertiary, secondary and primary (TESEP) classrooms found in the state education systems of all countries, and developing countries in particular. TESEP institutions have very different social contexts to those contexts under which the weak view was developed, such as large classes (over 40 students), limited educational resources, and teachers with limited English proficiency. Holliday suggests there exists a 'strong' view of CLT which may be more compatible with TESEP contexts.

Holliday (1998) gives examples of six classes taught by NNS teachers that he observed in India and China. Three classes displayed some classic but superficial CLT features, such as small class size, U-shaped room set up for group work, or the teacher giving up the 'front' position. However, despite these features there was no real communicative involvement. The other three classes did not display these features, but were what Holliday considered still communicative, and illustrative of a 'strong view' of CLT.

Holliday's 'strong' view is based on 'deeper interpretations' of CLT, which are transferable to TESEP contexts. The strong view (unlike the 'weak' view which concentrates on language practice) focuses on understanding how language works at the discourse level, and uses input to aid production. Key issues or 'communicative principles' of the strong view include:

- engagement with the text (whether written or spoken) – where the students are challenged cognitively by the text, and interact with each other and the teacher in order to understand it
- a focus on both accuracy and fluency: grammar may be taught either explicitly or implicitly, as long as attention to accuracy is shown to relate to greater precision in the expression of meaning

- lecturer authority and control - it is possible for the teacher to take a 'strong teacher position' in the classroom with always adopting the traditional 'teacher in front of the class' position (teacher fronting), yet still be 'communicative'
- cultural continuity between the traditional and innovative methodologies for example, preserving traditional seating arrangements, and teacher-fronting in order to maintain teacher status and authority and to provide a 'cultural bridge'

In Holliday (1994b:171-2) he describes how the 'strong' view might be realised in class:

1. Rather than language models, students study content, which may be written or spoken (e.g. a cassette recording of a talk on the latest developments in cloning, or a written text on the effects on a culture of international tourism).
2. Students carry out tasks designed around language problems.
3. When these language problems are solved, students are able to understand its meaning and 'unlock' the text by working out how it is constructed and how the language rules it contains operate.
4. The output may be spoken or written, showing the language forms used in the input text, or alternatively a report of the activity outcome.
5. Students may work collaboratively for 2) above, not for the purpose of communicating in a social sense with each other, but in order to solve language problems. This reduces the necessity to use English all the time as students may talk about the text in their native languages. The need for monitoring pair or group work is thus also reduced.
6. Students need not work in pairs or groups, but may work individually, and producing hypotheses about the language.

NNS teachers may object that this sort of discovery learning is not suitable for their students who are used to being provided with all necessary information by the teacher. However, research by Siti Wachidah (2001) shows that Indonesian High School students are not only capable of discovery learning, but also capable of undertaking discovery learning outside the classroom.

For NNS in EFL situations, Holliday's 'strong' approach suggests the need for well-designed textbooks, and well-trained teachers with a

good command of English and a good knowledge of English grammar. Holliday himself notes (p.172) that 'teachers who have been brought up on structures' would find the strong approach difficult to understand and digest.

Critical Applied Linguistics

Holliday's work is an important example of a field of Applied Linguistics that has grown significantly in importance over the last 15 years: that of critical pedagogy. Critical approaches to pedagogy are generally concerned with the roles of ideology and power. As McCarthy (2001) puts it, critical pedagogy takes the view that language is never neutral and always bound up with particular ways of seeing the world. The major work that sparked off this debate was Robert Phillipson's (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*, which argued that in the post-colonial world, the 'centre' (Native English speaking countries) controls global economic, military, commercial and diplomatic structures, and consequently controls the 'periphery' countries (all the rest). English is co-occurrent with this imperialist domination. In Phillipson's view, all language aid work which buttresses the position of English in developing countries is fundamentally imperialistic because it perpetuates relations of dependence between the core native English speaking countries at the centre and the ESL and EFL countries in the periphery. This can be clearly seen in the way aid experts are sent or organise language to host countries whose own personnel are regarded as insufficiently trained to carry out such work.

Phillipson traces the beginnings of English linguistic imperialism to colonial times where local languages were considered of low status, local educational traditions were ignored and the civilizing properties of the colonizer were emphasized. Education at both secondary and tertiary level education followed European Monolingual traditions. The English language syllabus from 'Accra to Zanzibar' (Phillipson, 199:46) was a British one, modeled on English as a mother tongue teaching. In post-colonial societies little has changed. In general, regional languages, some of which may have enjoyed period of glory directly after independence, continue to have a lower status than English, receive less attention in the school curriculum, and may even be displaced by English.

Issues raised by critical applied linguists include issue of how

methodologies developed for the Centre are exported to the Periphery (see discussion on Holliday above), research; and linguistic genocide. Let us look at the issue of research. Up to 1994 there was surprisingly little research at an academic level into issues that related to EFL in developing countries, despite the fact that this is where the majority of learners are located. Few articles by authors from developing countries could be found in major TESOL journals, making the flow of information from Centre to Periphery one way. This however, has changed over the last few years, and now it is far more common to find articles by NNS authors from developing countries in the major TESOL journals. However, it is still difficult to find articles addressing such important issues as large classes (over 45 students), difficult classroom conditions (such as poor acoustics), few facilities (such as photocopiers or text resources), a rigid curriculum and set textbook, and curtailment over what teachers are able to do by cultural traditions and constraints imposed by wider educational, institutional and community forces. The agenda still tends to be driven by those in the Centre.

The third issue is linguistic genocide, and related to what Kachru (1986) calls 'English as the Killer language'. This concerns the threat that English (or any of the other powerful languages of the world) poses to a large number of less powerful indigenous languages. Of the approximately 6,000 languages in use in the world today (of which about 25% are to be found in Papua-New Guinea and Indonesia), it is estimated that by the end of this century, 90% of the world's languages will be extinct, leaving us with about 600 languages which are safe (Krauss in Crystal 1997). A more conservative estimate is that approximately 50% will die, or one language will become extinct every two weeks (Crystal 1997). There are many reasons why this is not desirable, including the fact that languages express identity ('a nation without its own language is a nation without a heart' Crystal 1997), that languages are repositories of history, and that they contribute to the sum of human knowledge. However, what concerns critical linguists is that the dominance of English may be a factor which leads to Language death. Crystal (1997) lists two major reasons for language death: factors which put people in danger (such as war), and factors which change people's culture, including military and/or economic dominance (eg colonization), Western consumer culture, urbanisation, developments in communications and transport, and

the learning of a dominant language, such as English. These are serious considerations for language planners throughout the world, and should not be taken lightly.

Task-based Learning

Returning to how we should help learners learn a language, the most common way of conceptualising CLT in the classroom today is in relation to tasks. Richards (1999) points out that the thinking behind task-based teaching is the belief that successful language learning results primarily from students engaging in tasks that require them to negotiate meaning and participate in naturalistic and meaningful communication.

A task, according to Nunan, is

'a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focussed on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.' (Nunan, 1989: 10)

Skehan (1996, 1998) defines a task as an activity in which

- meaning is primary
- there is a goal which needs to be worked towards
- the activity is outcome-oriented
- there is some sort of relationship to the real world

Shehan comments it is difficult to satisfy all criteria and most tasks are a mixture of these.

Many writers distinguish between 'real world tasks' and pedagogic tasks. Nunan (1989), for example, argues the selection of tasks should involve the following stages:

1. select the real world target tasks
2. give learners a model of target language behaviour
3. give learners practice in manipulating key language items
4. devise a pedagogic task.

The important point, then, is that task based learning is oriented towards real world use of language to achieve some tangible purpose or goal.

On the level of curriculum, writers such as Skehan (1996) draw a distinction between strong and weak forms of task-based teaching. The strong form consists only of tasks, and these are believed sufficient to promote language development. In the weak form, tasks are believed necessary but not sufficient to drive language acquisition, and other pedagogical procedures are required, especially instruction at the pre-task and post task stages.

Most writers agree that the best approach to tasks is a three phase approach (see Skehan 2000):

- i. **pre-task phase** which serves an orientation function, establishing a frame of reference for the listening/reading/writing/peaking/grammar that follows by providing a context, and/or helping learners predict some of the content of what they will receive or produce. Pre-task activities, such as brainstorming a topic, or predicting vocabulary that will be used, generates language which may be used later, particularly topic-related vocabulary. The use of pre-task activities has been shown to improve either or both accuracy and fluency (Foster and Skehan 1996). For speaking or writing activities, allowing time for planning allows routinised language to be accessed more readily (leading to greater fluency) and enables learners to prepare the content of the task (resulting in greater accuracy and complexity).
- ii. **during task manipulations** encourage learners to focus on what they should be receiving or producing, and why ('communicative intent'). This phase includes such activities as skimming or scanning a reading text, confirming expectations about the text, answering detailed comprehension question about a listening text, performing a role play, playing a language game, or writing the first draft of an essay. -
- iii. **post-task phase** provides an excellent opportunity for follow-up work. Activities may focus on themes, vocabulary, grammar, skills, or detail. Sample activities include using notes made while listening to write a summary, reading a related text, doing a role-play, writing on the same theme, studying new grammatical structures, or practising pronunciation. Post-task activities can have an impact on how the task is done, especially if learners will

later have to perform the task in front of the class. Tasks may also be repeated, such as in the public performance of a task. There is evidence to suggest that repeating tasks, for example, after 1-3 weeks, rather than inducing boredom, produces language which is more complex (Bygate 2001).

Willis (1996) suggests a variation of this order. In her model, the task generates a language need, which the teacher provides, ensuring that the appropriate consolidation and integration of new forms into existing structures can occur. In other words, learners start with a task which creates a need for language. This encourages them to become aware of (i.e. notice) what they need to be able to say in order to do the task. Finally there is a focus on grammar.

The criticism regarding neglect of grammar in CLT also applies to task-based instruction. Richards (1999) lists a number of problems raised by scholars in the respect. Foster (1998) found that during group work in a real classroom situation, there was little negotiation of meaning, despite the predictions of researchers. Higgs and Clifford (1982 in Richards 1999) argue that 'premature immersion of a student into an unstructured or free conversational setting before certain fundamental linguistic structures are more or less in place is not done without cost'. In task work, 'communicative competence is [often used] as a term for communication in spite of language rather than communication through language' (ibid p.4). Accurate use of grammar and phonology is often missing, and communication during fluency work is often marked by low levels of linguistic accuracy. This is especially damaging for beginner and elementary students, who may not develop adequate levels of accuracy even though they can get their message across (cf. also Swain 1985).

A similar argument comes from Skehan (1996), who claims that task-based learning can result in an overemphasis on the production of meaning, and fail to provide learners with enough grammatical and lexical support. In other words, it may promote fluency but neglect accuracy and restructuring. Skehan argues that one of the goals of communication is to extract meaning, and task-based instruction may encourage learners to become heavily dependent on vocabulary and memorised chunks of language (such as exemplars), together with non-verbal communication strategies, to get their meanings across. This is because the emphasis in task-based learning is on

meaning and the evaluation of the outcome. Tasks, especially in the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, rather than encouraging accuracy and restructuring, may encourage fluency, leaving the development of the grammatical system behind.

According to Skehan, tasks may be especially helpful in developing fluency, but must be supplemented by activities that allow the learners to develop both well-formed exemplars for ready access and rule-based modes when they need to be accurate and precise. If we fail to pay attention to this aspect, we run the risk of over-prioritising attentional resources towards fluency, emphasising accessibility at the expense of complexity/restructuring and of accuracy.

A fundamental tension in CLT is the bringing together of form and meaning. The learner has to have something worthwhile to say but then a) content may become of primary importance and b) concern with content will consume attentional resources. It is important then that attention be paid to the teaching of grammar. Richards (1999) suggests a number of ways that attention to grammar can be promoted at the various stages of the task process described above. The treatment of grammar he suggests can be treated by either explicit or implicit instruction, though research is still required on these factors.

The implications for syllabus design are i) to pitch tasks at the right level of processing difficulty, so that learners are not over-taxed; ii) to avoid non-challenging tasks which do not extend learners' ability to use their knowledge of the language; and iii) to include cycles of activity organised to include a balance between a focus on grammar (accuracy) and a focus on communication (fluency), yet also provide the opportunity for restructuring,

Current Methods of Teaching Grammar

Currently many scholars advocate the use of implicit methods of teaching grammar, such as consciousness raising, and noticing. Rutherford (1987), an important advocate of consciousness-raising, sees language learning as consisting of the gradual accumulation of grammatical items. The process of accumulation of grammar items, he argues, is not helped by the teaching of grammar rules because of their complexity and the inter-relationships between them. Rutherford suggests that classroom activities should be inductive rather than deductive (i.e.

consist of discovery learning rather than explicit instruction). Grammar activities, he claims, should consist of sentences that provide data through which learners form and test hypotheses. These sentences may be discrete, or contained in a stretch of text, and should help learners link the new with what they already know.

Consciousness-raising is dependent on noticing. Schmidt and Frota (1986) found that new forms were incorporated into a learner's speech when they were noticed by him in conversation with native speakers of the target language. Forms that were not noticed were not incorporated into his speech. Noticing occurs where learners recognise the differences between forms they are using and target forms. However, some unconscious discovery of rules can also occur. In grammar teaching, noticing may consist of getting learners to underline all the instances of a particular structure in a text. Conscious-raising may then require learners to hypothesise the form and function of the structure. Thornbury (1997), however, claims that noticing is not sufficient if learners lack the strategies to take advantage of them: learners may need training and development in noticing.

Many teachers have found that consciousness-raising is useful for simple grammatical rules, but far too complex for many learners, who may request a return to explicit teaching of grammar. It is useful to note that Sharwood-Smith (1981) sees traditional instruction is one type of consciousness raising.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to outline a number of changes that have occurred in TESOL over the last 25 years, an account which necessarily, because of reasons of space, omits many developments which have also had a significant impact on TESOL, such as developments in language testing. If viewed dispassionately, this review may prompt some readers to wonder what, for all our enquiry, have we concluded? A skeptic might claim that little has really changed: the view of language as an abstract system is still with us in SLA and in the work of the cognitivists, behaviorism has been resurrected to assist with automatising, and so on. Certainly, as Howatt (1984) has claimed, there is little new under the sun in language teaching.

But perhaps for teachers, the important thing is to follow these twists and turns in the debate, and to critically evaluate all arguments, and to be open to change, because by doing so we can help keep alive our 'sense of plausibility'. By following the debate we can better understand how our teaching leads to, or can lead to, increased learning, and increased rapport with our students. We can thus hopefully avoid the pitfalls of mechanistic, over-routinised teaching, which by anyone's estimation can lead to bad teaching. It may be that good teaching consists, as maybe it has always done, of being fully involved in what we do, encouraging our learners to engage with the text at every level, and to give appropriate emphasis to accuracy, fluency and restructuring.

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