Research on Language and Learning: Implications for Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Taking into account several limitations of communicative language teaching (CLT), this paper calls for the need to consider research on language use and learning through communication as a basis for language teaching. It will be argued that a reflective approach towards language teaching and learning might be generated, which is explained in terms of the need to develop a context-sensitive pedagogy and in terms of teachers' and learners' development.

KEYWORDS: Language use, teaching, leaming.

INTRODUCTION

The limitations of the concept of method becomes obvious in the literature on language teaching methodology. This is also referred to as the pendulum metaphor, that is to say, a method is proposed as a reform or rejection of a previously accepted method, it is applied in the language classroom, and eventually it is criticised or extended (for a review see Alcaraz et al., 1993; Alcón, 2002a; Howatt, 1984; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Sánchez, 1993, 1997). Furthermore,

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as reported by Nassaji (2000), throughout the history of English language teaching methodology, there seems to be a dilemma over focused analytic versus unfocused experiential language teaching. While the former considers learning as the development of formal rule-based knowledge, the latter conceptualises learning as the result of naturalistic use of language. Experiential approaches have been dominant in language teaching since the appearance of the communicative language teaching approach (CLT) in 1970 and its spread in the 1980s. However, as suggested by Thompson (1996), the 1990s witnessed dissatisfaction with several aspects of CLT, which calls for a further development of CLT, without questioning its goals and principles.

Besides, over the last decade, there seems to be some agreement on the argument that second language acquisition (SLA) research mediates between the theory and practice of language acquisition and use (Kramsch, 2000). Research on language learning includes a broad range of perspectives and the pendulum metaphor also applies to it. According to Lazaraton (2000), there has been a prominence of quantitative research as both a subject of theoretical discussion and a method for conducting empirical work. This trend might explain why reference books on research methodology in applied linguistics focus on quantitative research methods while there are to date no qualitative research textbooks wntten by applied linguists. However, based on work by linguistic anthropologists, ethnographers of communication and qualitative researchers interested in language use, there also seems to be a trend to illustrate the ways in which qualitative research can contribute to an understanding of second language acquisition and use (see Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Cumming, 1994). In line with Reichardt and Cook (1979: 27), we believe that, similar to the limitations of the concept of "method" and "approach", it would be a mistake to keep the pendulum swinging between research perspectives. In this sense, any attempt to consider the contributions of research on language learning should see quantitative and qualitative approaches as complementary research paradigms. This, in tum, might help language teachers to apply the research on language learning in their teaching practices, and maybe act as a challenge to conduct research in their own classrooms.

Taking into account that quantitative and qualitative research mediates between theory and practice in language teaching and considering several limitations of CLT, the aim of this chapter is, first, to illustrate how description of language in use and research on language learning through communication provides teachers with a basis for language teaching. Secondly, a reflective approach towards language teaching and learning is suggested as a way of developing a context-sensitive pedagogy. Finally, we present new roles and new perspectives for language teachers, which might result in learner and teacher development.

1.1. Principles and criticisms of communicative language teaching

As we have mentioned in the introduction, a similar pattern of development can be observed in the different methods and approaches to language teaching. In this sense, CLT was proposed as a reform or rejection of previously accepted methods and approaches, it was applied in the language classroom, and eventually it has been criticised. In spite of these criticisms, Thompson

(1996) claims that CLT is accepted as the dominant paradigm in language teaching. In fact, two guiding **principles** of CLT are widely accepted by the teaching profession: the need to develop learners' communicative competence, and the **assumption** that communication is both an end and a means towards Ianguage Ieaming. In relation to leamers' development of communicative competence, it is widely recognised that communication is important for the needs of leamers, and for the processes of language leaming (Widdowson, 1978, 1989). The second guiding principle of CLT suggests that communication is both an end and a means to language leaming. Following this **principle,** and according to the interactive perspective, leaming a language is a function of social and meaningful interaction (Long, **1985),** and the degree of success in language leaming depends on the quality of interaction in the educational setting (Long, 1983a, 1996).

In spite of accepting CLT as the dominant paradigm in language teaching, it is **possible** to claim that the teaching profession remains confused when its main principles are translated into **classroom** practice. Much of the confusion and the consequent dissatisfaction may be summarised in the following criticisms:

a) The lack of linguistic guidelines, which **results** in **problems** to identify the linguistic content of CLT.

b) Interactive tasks, which are supposed to focus on the comprehensibility of the language, give priority to fluency over accuracy.

c) Language **forms,** although **necessary** in language leaming, are not considered in CLT.

d) Conversational interaction may not match the leamer's view of leaming.

In relation to the linguistic content of CLT, **several** attempts **have been** made to specify the content of a communicative language syllabi (van Ek, 1977; van Ek & Trim, 1991; Wilkins, **1976),** but these functional approaches **have** not **taken** into account the nature of interaction **or** the **features** of natural conversation. However, nowadays, and due to research **findings** in **areas** such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and interlanguage analysis, language teachers are provided with descriptions of language in use, which may be used in designing language syllabi, instructional materials and **assessment** instruments. **Besides,** there **have been** different attempts to specify the content of CLT, taking into account models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; **Canale,** 1983; **Canale** & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia & Domyei, 1995). These models, **despite** their limitations (see Celce-Murcia & Dornyei, **1995),** offer language teachers the possibility of adapting the linguistic content of their syllabus according to the leamers' communicative needs. In a similar vein, there has **been** an increasing interest in considering various dimensions of the communicative competence in designing language syllabi.

In this sense, as reported by Alcón (2000a), the teaching of linguistic competence (i.e. the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) has been proved to be insufficient to develop learners' communicative competence. As a consequence, focusing on pragmatics, discourse, and strategic competence are also considered as goals in language teaching. The problem seems to be that, although studies of the nature of language from a discourse perspective have (i) increased our knowledge of native and non-native language use, and (ii) have influenced the selection of the linguistic content, questions remain about how to apply this knowledge in language teaching.

The second and third criticisms are related to the second guiding principle of CLT, which suggests that communication is both an end and a means to language learning. According to the interactive perspective (Long, 1985, 1996), learning a language is a function of social and meaningful interaction, and the degree of success in language learning depends on the quality of interaction in the acquisitional setting (Long, 1983a). From a communicative perspective, it is argued that communicative tasks encourage talk, providing learners with opportunities to share ideas or to achieve a communicative goal. From a learning point of view, it is widely accepted that in a task-based learning pedagogy learners do not acquire the target language in the order it is presented to them. In this sense, engaging learners in meaningful activities, such as information gaps, problem solving or discussions was claimed to promote the natural language learning process. The problem is that on the one hand, and especially in foreign language contexts, the amount and quality of interaction is limited (García Mayo & Pica, 2000). On the other hand, in a task-based pedagogy, language teachers observe how learners are mainly encouraged to focus on the comprehensibility of the language using ill-formed language. The danger is that learners give priority to a focus on fluency over accuracy, and, as a result, linguistic forms may go unnoticed.

The fourth criticism is related to the accepted claim that learners' participation in conversation provides them with opportunities for learning. Although empirical research on the effect of interaction on language learning shows that conversational interaction sets the scene for language learning, it is also true that it is not a cause for acquisition (see Gass et al., 1998). Besides, as reported by Alcón (1994) and Allwright and Bailey (1991), although risk-taking is favourably viewed in second language acquisition, verbal passivity on the part of the learner can mask greater attention than conversational participation. In this sense, it seems that some cognitive and affective factors may determine the role of conversation participation in relation to learning outcomes.

In spite of the criticisms mentioned above, we agree with Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1997) and Thompson (1996) on the fact that the two guiding principles of CLT (i.e. the need to develop learners' communicative competence and the assumptions that communication is both an end and a means towards language learning) are valid to set the goals in language learning. However, one also has to admit that teachers' concern about these limitations requires finding alternative methodological options in different learning contexts (Bax, 2003;

Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Pica, 2000). Taking into account Kramsch's (2000) suggestion, we will now turn to consider how research on the nature of language and language leaming has dealt with the criticisms towards CLT. This analysis will lead us to suggest some pedagogical implications of the research reviewed.

1.2. Describing language in use as a basis to identify the linguistic content of CLT

Kramsch (2000) suggests the need to consider research on applied linguistics as a way to help language teachers to translate theory into practice. In this vein, we also believe that language teaching methodology should be implicitly or explicitly informed by linguistic research on the nature of language and by insights from second language acquisition research. With regard to the nature of language, discourse analysis and communicative language teaching share a consensus about the importance of communication. From this perspective, describing language in use in naturally occurring contexts has been applied to the different levels of linguistic analysis and this has helped to identify the linguistic content of CLT. In relation to phonology, studies such as the ones by Brown and Yule (1983a, 1983b), Cruttenden (1986) and Hewings (1990) have provided us with new insights for the teaching of pronunciation and prosodic aspects (see Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994; among others). Discourse analysis has also analysed grammar from various perspectives relevant to language teaching. Thus, several studies have examined the notion of cohesion and coherence and have illustrated the grammatical connexions between clauses and utterances, segments of discourse, and how information is selected and presented in discourse. The analysis of grammar as an aspect of discourse rather than a set of units detached from discourse has influenced current approaches to the teaching of grammar (see Batstone, 1996; Hughes & McCarthy, 1998; Leech, 2000). Taking into account the view of grammar as a set of discourse choices, learners are provided with activities which focus on either awareness of the grammatical system of the language used, or on the production of language choices in particular contexts.

The study of language use in particular contexts has also focused on the analysis of vocabulary above the sentence level and has shed light on the nature of vocabulary; more specifically, it has shown the relationship between context, grammar and vocabulary. This is explicitly stated by Halliday (1978: 43):

> The lexical systern is not sornething that is fitted in afterwards to a set of slots defined by the gramrnar. The lexicon ... is simply the most delicate gramrnar ... as things become more and more specific, they tend more and more to be realised by the choice of a lexical item rather than the choice of a grammatical structure.

The analysis of lexical cohesion, the research on the role of vocabulary in signalling textual patterns in discourse, and on the relationship between lexical selection and register have offered the teaching profession insights into the teaching of vocabulary. Thus, studies such as the ones by Guzman *et ul.* (2000) and Norment (1995) analyse differences in lexical cohesion

in native and non-native written production. By examining the transferability of lexical **features** frorn one language to another, these authors **call** for a discourse approach towards teaching discourse cornpetence in language **learning**. In addition, the analysis of vocabulary above the sentence **level** has influenced the design of discourse-based activities which prornote awareness of lexical choice and the relationship between grarnrnar and vocabulary (see Bygate *et* al., 1994; **McCarthy,** 1990; Taylor, 1990; among others).

Moreover, the increasing understanding of language use in speech and writing has undoubtedly influenced the teaching of oral and written skills. As far as the teaching of oral skills is concerned, and taking into account the dynamic and interactive nature of oral cornmunication, research on discourse analysis has examined the skills used by interlocutors in oral interaction, that is to say, how interlocutors participate in the managing of discourse. From observations of how people **behave** in spoken discourse, we **have** gained a better understanding of **some** conversational **features** such as turn-taking organisation (Power & **Dal Martello**, 1986; Sacks et al., 1974; **Starkey, 1973),** adjacency **pairs** (Gibbs & Mueller, 1988; Schegloff & Sacks, **1973),** topic development (Kneenan & Schieffelin, 1975; Levinson, 1983; Stech, **1982),** and pragmalinguistic aspects of spoken discourse such as the use of back **channels** (Duncan 1972; Yngve, 1970) and **polite** and indirect speech acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983).

Research has **also** provided **us** with inforrnation about non-native speakers' language use in the spoken mode both in and **outside** the institutional classroorn setting (Garcia Mayo, **2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b;** Lorscher, 1986; **McHoul,** 1978; Van Lier, 1988). Similarly, developmental issues **have been** discussed **in** interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper & **Blum-Kulka,** 1993; Kasper & Schrnidt, 1996) frorn the perspective of pragrnatic transfer (Bou-Franch, 1998; Olshtain, 1983; Takahashi, 1996) or of contrastive pragrnatics (Cenoz & Valencia, 1996; House, 1993; Oleksy, 1989). This body of knowledge has contributed to increasing our understanding of **native/non-**native and non-native/non-native cornmunication, although questions remain about how to apply this knowledge in language teaching. The analysis of the role of instruction in acquiring pragmatic competence (House, 1996; Martínez et al., 2003; Safont, 2003) and the study of pragmatic cornpetence and second language developrnent and teaching has **also** moved research into the **acquisition** of pragmatic competence in instructional settings (Bou-Franch & **Garcés-**Conejos, 2003; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

With regard to the teaching of written skills, the analysis of written language has contributed to a better understanding of the texture and structure of texts and how both texture and structure illustrate the interactive nature of reading and writing. Such analysis of written discourse has **also illustrated** the different rnechanisrns we **have** at our disposal for teaching reading and writing (see Hudson, 1998 and **Wallace,** 1992 for a review on teaching reading and Cumrning, 1998; Manchón, 1999, Raimes, 1998 and Tribble, 1996 for a review on teaching writing). However, as we **have** rnentioned in relation to spoken discourse, although the analysis of language in use has provided **us** with insights into the linguistic **resources** which show the interactive nature of written discourse, there is **also** a need for **further** research into the role of

intervention in helping language learners to recognise those resources and to use thern in cornprehension and production of **written** texts.

1.3. Research on language learning through communication as a basis for language teaching

There is a growing interest in the SLA field to understand the second guiding principle of CLT, that is to say, to explain language learning through interaction (see the special issues on interaction and second language learning by García Mayo & Alcón, 2002; and Gass et al., 1998). Since Hatch illustrated in 1975 how leamers' participation in conversations provided thern with opportunities for language leaming, it has been widely adrnitted that sorne type of input is essential for language learning. Research then focused on the type and amount of input necessary for SLA, and on the consequences derived from a lack of understanding of the input. Krashen's theory of comprehensible input (1985) and Long's interactional hypothesis (1980, 1983a, 1985, 1996) were ernpirically tested in studies on the effect of input rnodifications (Chaudron, 1983; Long, 1985) and interaction rnodifications (Pica, 1991; Pica, Doughty & Young, 1986; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987) on second language cornprehension. The pedagogical irnplication of research on learners' need for comprehensible input resulted in accepting the concept of communicative tasks as a basic unit to analyse classroom interaction and as an essential component of curriculrn design.

However, both teachers and researchers have becorne aware of the second criticism of CLT we have mentioned above, that is to say, that comrnunicative tasks are meaning-based classroom activities with a focus on fluency over accuracy. Learners' involvernent in interactive tasks was seen as a way to provide thern with comprehensible input and with opportunities to practice existing knowledge. Based on the fact that students in immersion programmes in Canada failed to acquire proficiency competence, Swain (1985) introduced the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, which suggests that learners need opportunities for pushed output, that is to say, they need demands for correct and appropriate use of their production. Swain (1995), in explaining second language acquisition from an output perspective, suggested that the verbal behaviour of teacher and students triggers the theoretical conditions for language learning. In other words, it is claimed that through interaction language learners notice linguistic problems (the noticing function), solve them through dialogue (the hypothesis-testing function) and reflect about language (the metalinguistic function). Empirical evidence supporting Swain's hypothesis illustrates that language learners can be pushed by their interlocutors to produce more appropriate and correct target language in meaning-centred instruction (Alcón, 2002; Ellis & He, 1999; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). In this sense, although as reported by Shehadeh (2000) the way in which students' output contributes to language learning requires further empirical evidence, cornmunicative tasks with a focus on form are encouraged. SLA research illustrates that communicative activities with a focus on meaning alone are not adequate for language learning and special attention is paid to the need to focus on linguistic forms, an

aspect which has been mentioned in the third criticism of CLT. In this vein, recent studies coincide in the need to include a focus on form approach in the classroom (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Garcia Mayo, 2002a, 2002b; Muranoi, 2000), since research findings show that negotiation of meaning and successful communication may result in "understanding" but not necessary in "acquisition".

Theoretical explanations for the need to focus on form derive from research which claims that instruction makes a difference in language learning (see Long, 1983b; and Norris & Ortega, 2001 for a review of research on the effectiveness of L2 instruction published between 1980 and 1998). In addition, information processing models posit that learners' limited processing capacity is limited to attend simultaneously to form and meaning. In this sense and according to Schmidt's (1990, 1994) Noticing Hypothesis, unless learners attend to form in meaning-focused instruction, acquisition will not take place. Following this assumption, a focus on form instruction (Long, 1991; Doughty, 2001) is suggested in CLT methodology. In contrast to "focus on forms" where there is a focus on grammar teaching, in "focus on form" the emphasis is on rneaning but the learner's attention is briefly shifted to form (example a).

> Exarnple a:
> > T: **What are they doing?**
> > S: **He ate the cake.**
> > T: **Yes, but ate, is that correct?, ate?**
> > S: **Uhmm... eat... are eating.**
> > T: **They are eating the cake, right.**
> > S: **and they are happy**
> > T: **umm**
> > S: **because they are on holidays**
> > > **(Alcón, 1993)**

In relation to the procedures for form-focused instruction in the context of a communicative activity, Ellis (2001) and Ellis *et* al. (2002), distinguish between "planned" versus "incidental" focus on form. Both types of focus on form require the use of communicative tasks. However, the former involves the use of communicative tasks designed to elicit forms which have been pre-selected by the teacher, while the latter tasks are designed to elicit and use language without any specific attention to form. Planned task proposals can be found in Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993), Fotos (1993, 1994, 1997) and Fotos and Ellis (1991). Although these authors claim that planned tasks are effective because learners are forced to focus on form while they are communicating, the actual design of the tasks may be problematic. Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) claim that in designing forrn-focused communicative tasks the relationship between the form selected and the completion of the task is central. The authors distinguish three types of relationship: naturalness, utility and essentialness. While in the task-naturalness and utility relationship the form selected is not an obligatory part of the task, in the task-essentialness

relationship the use of the form selected is **necessary** to complete the task **content.** Although Loschky and Bley-Vroman's (1993) **classification** might be useful in order to design form-focused communicative tasks, further classroom research is needed to examine the extent to which the tasks **generate** form-focus interaction versus meaning-focus interaction.

Fotos (1993, 1994, 1997) and Fotos and **Ellis** (1991) emphasise the pedagogical advantages of using grammar awareness-raising tasks as a way to integrate focus on form within a communicative framework. In this case, learners are presented with grammar problem tasks and, in **pairs** or **small** groups, they are asked to **discover** or analyse a selected form. In the same vein, Lyster **(1998a)** points out that planned focused tasks **provide** learners with negotiation on form, that is to say, they **provide** metalinguistic information about pre-selected forms. However, further research **is** needed before generalising the pedagogical implications of these studies. First of **all**, studies on the task-based approach to focus on form directed at **all** linguistic **levels** are needed. Secondly, observational and experimental studies on participants' role in performing the tasks **should** be conducted in order to determine whether a focus on accuracy **could** be achieved in unplanned tasks through methodology rather than task design. Collaborative tasks such as dictogloss, where learners are asked to reconstruct a text previously **listened** to, are good candidates to evaluate that task design and process are key issues in a focus on form instruction. As **illustrated** in example b, in the task design, the focus **is** on conditional clauses, but it is learners' participation in the task that **results** in productive use of the selected form.

Example b:
    S1: And then **I** would say if **I** was last year **I** wouldn't
    S2: **If I** were
    SI: **If I** were
    S3: But it **was** last year then **...**
    S1: OK. **If I have been** last year in the committee **I** would **suggest**
    S3: Shouldn't we say **If I** had **been** last year in the committee?
    S2: Yes, **because** it's the third type of conditional
    S1: Oh. **If I** had **been** last year
    S3: **I** would **have** consider alternative four
    S2: Consider or considered?
    S1: Considered, third **type** of conditional. OK. **If I** had **been** last year on the committee 1 would **have** considered
    S2: Alternative four **because** the teacher **is** not enough
    S3: **Because** the opinion of a teacher, you mean?
    S1: Yes, **because** the opinion of a teacher **is** not enough
                 (Alcón, 2001)

In the case of unplanned tasks, the role of participants in performing the task **will** determine the accomplishment of a focus on form. On the one hand, a **reactive** focus on form takes place when the teacher or another student responds to an error in the context of a comrnunicative activity. As **reported** by Long and Robinson **(1998)**, this negative **evidence** can

be provided by explicit or implicit feedback. Explicit feedback is **performed** by giving metalinguistic information (example b), indicating directly that an error has **been** made (example c) or by eliciting the correct form (example d). lf negative feedback is provided by implicit feedback, such as in Doughty and **Valera's** (1998) or Mackey and Philp's (1998) studies, the leamer's utterance is recasted in the target language form (example e).

Example c:
>   S1: Then, you **have** to say if l **was** there l ...
>   T: lf l were
>   S1: lf l were there l wouldn't **have** accept
>   T: l wouldn't accept. Remember that we **have** a second conditional, past in the if **clause** plus simple conditional
>   **(Alcón,** 2001)

Example d:
>   Learner: Last weekend, a man painting, painting 'Beware of the dog'
>   Teacher: **Sorry?**
>   Learner: A man painted, painted, painted on the **wall** 'Beware of the dog'
>   **(Nobuyoshi** and **Ellis,** 1993: 205)

Example e:
>   S: Can l to the cinema?
>   T: Can you go to the cinema? Yes, that's an option
>   **(Alcón,** 1993)

There seems to be agreement on viewing corrective feedback as a theoretical condition for language leaming (Alcón, **2000b),** in the sense that it is a way to inform leamers about their output and to **provide** them with opportunities to test their hypotheses about the target language. Descriptive and experimental studies **have** illustrated that explicit corrective feedback may **vary** in terms of its explicitness, ranging in a continuurn from more direct to more indirect techniques. These studies **also** suggest that **further research** is required to determine the effectiveness of explicit feedback techniques and their contribution to SLA. As far as implicit feedback is concerned, Nicholas, Lightbown and Spada (2001) review observationai and experimental studies on recasts to conclude that these appear to be effective when the leamer understands that **the** recast is a reaction to the accuracy of the form, not to the content of the original utterance.

lnstead of adopting a **reactive** focus on form, the teacher or a student can **also** choose a pro-active focus on form by making a linguistic form the topic of discourse, even though no error has **been** committed. In this case, an explicit focus on form is achieved either by students' questions about linguistic forms (example f) or by teachers' display questions and information about the linguistic **code (example** g). As reported by **Ellis** et al. **(2001),** although pro-active focus on form has **been** little **studied** to date, researchers and teacher educators should pay

attention to it **as** another discourse device to achieve form-focused instruction.

Example f:
> **S: what's sacked?**
> **T: sacked is, when you lose your job, you do something wrong maybe, you steal something, and your boss says, right, leave the job**
>> (Ellis *et al.* 2001)

Example g:
> **T: What's the opposite of landing?**
> **S: Take off**
> **T: Take off**
> **SS: Take off**
>> (Ellis *et al.* 2001)

If the theoretical and empirical research on focus on form are taken together, it is clear that they **have** aroused a lot of interest **in** the field of SLA. As a matter of fact, in 2001 the journal *Language Learning* dedicated a special supplement defining and presenting experimental and descriptive research on form-focused instruction. In the annuai review on research on language teaching and learning, Johnstone (2002) **also** chooses "focus on form" as a theme that seems to be of particular interest in 2001. Earlier research on focus on form instruction focused on conceptualising and describing its various manifestations, but **current** research focuses on how it is accomplished in different **educational** settings (Ellis, 2001; García Mayo & Alcón, 2002; Williarns, 1999; among others), and the effect of different types of focus on form on second language acquisition (Ellis et al. 2001,2002; Sheen, 2003). Moreover, there seems to be a trend towards data-driven and interpretative studies that might **provide** us with detailed information about how focus on form is accomplished in actual language classrooms. There is aiso a need for hybrid research, which combines the description of intact classroom discourse and the processes that might **have** an effect on leamers' outcomes. This research would offer language teachers useful information about the way to incorporate focus on form in cornmunicative language classroorns. It will then be **necessary** to consider teachers' reflections and actions in particular learning contexts to **validate** the effect of focus on form in language leaming and its pedagogical possibilities. This is **particularly** relevant in order to explain the last lirnitation of CLT we **have** mentioned above. The question would be to consider whether the CLT approach, where emphasis is placed on language learning **through** communication, matches learners' view of learning. In other words, do individual and cognitive factors play a role in language leaming? So far we **have** mentioned that factors such **as** input, task design and focus on form may facilitate the acquisition of a second language. However, given that these factors are **external** to the leamer, language teaching must **also** take into account learners' individual factors and adjust language teaching to leamers' needs and goals. In **line** with Kumaravadivelu

(1994) and Pica (2000), we believe that teachers should seek alternative methods in response to particular situations. That is to say, the role of teachers should now be extended towards developing a reflective approach towards language teaching and learning.

1.4. A reflective approach towards language teaching and learning and its contributions to a context-sensitive pedagogy

In reflective teaching, the teachers' roles should be extended in two respects. First, they should reflect about the research on the nature of language and learning and, secondly, they should conduct their own research to further understand what goes on in particular settings. In this sense, any pedagogical implication from research on language learning must be understood in particular language learning contexts, since differences might emerge depending on whether learning contexts (second or foreign language environments), educational and social concerns, age of learners, etc. Teachers might undertake research on the nature of language and language learning as a starting point to apply the results of this research into their own classroom. They should also consider the dichotomy of the product and process approach to research on language learning. The former had its origins in the methods comparison studies of the 1960s and is represented by experimental research aimed at testing learning outcomes. In reaction to this tendency, studies in the 1970s and 1980s focus on developing adequate and reliable systems for observing and describing classroom behaviours (see Allwright, 1988; Chaudron, 1988 for a review of these observation schemes), and have influenced descriptive and interpretative research orientations. Although the dichotomy between product and process approaches is not so simple when it comes to data collection (quantitative versus qualitative) or research strategies (non-participant versus participant observation), results of published research offer language teachers the opportunity to connect researchers' knowledge on language learning to the particularities of specific contexts. More specifically, teachers can exploit some of the insights from research on language use and learning to improve their methodological options by:

> • Examining learners' reaction towards real language in use materials versus pedagogical materials. Awareness-raising tasks or grammatical judgement tasks are claimed to be effective to develop learners' knowledge of how language works in context. However, learners' reaction towards these tasks may differ in different contexts or may vary across learners.

> • Exploring the use of tasks designed with a planned focus on form. The analysis of the interaction triggered by awareness-raising tasks or through the use of dictoglos can illustrate whether they are useful to promote some of the theoretical conditions for language learning, i.e. the noticing function, the hypothesis testing function and the metalinguistic function.

• Evaluating learners' response to unplanned focus on form in communicative activities in the classroom. By so doing, they can assess the value of focusing on form as part of natural communication, paying attention to teachers' types of feedback (explicit versus implicit devices) or students' feedback.

Teachers' research can also be initiated with the aim to explore learners' factors in particular situations with the aim of understanding their effect on their teaching practices and of improving language instruction. That is to say, language teachers know that language teaching must be sensitive to a particular group of learners in particular educational contexts. This can first be achieved by taking into account variables such as motivation, anxiety, extroversion, or aptitude, which have been shown to be related to language learning in various ways (see Arnold, 1999), and adjusting language teaching to learners' individual factors. Secondly, teachers might carry out research to evaluate the outcomes of learners' strategy training. In this sense, research might be used to decide how to cope with learners' diversity by improving L2 students' learning strategies. Besides, teachers can be challenged with questions that can only be answered with a focus on learners and their learning. For instance:

1. Do individual differences play a role in strategy instruction?

2. Do explicit instruction and awareness of learning strategy have an effect on learners with different learning styles?

3. Does training learners towards strategy use result in effective learning?

4. How do different cognitive processes influence learners' development of the target language?

Furthermore, reflective teaching which is integrated with day to day teaching and which emphasises the demands of the context encourages reflective learning. This means an increased awareness of learning styles and preferences, as well as a conscious reflection in the light of learning objectives and tasks demands. In other words, in reflective learning learners need to plan, carry out and evaluate their own learning process in an effort to become autonomous learners. According to Holec (1987), in order to engage in autonomous learning, the learners must review their representation of what a language is and what learning a language is, so that they can shift from the role of consumer to the role of producer of their own learning programme. In this line, Nunan (1997) considers that autonomy is not an absolute concept as it involves different stages. namely those of awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence. In the first stage, learners become aware of the aims, content and strategies involved in the tasks they are performing. The second stage allows learners to be involved in choosing from

a range of alternative contents and options. The next step, that of intervention, involves encouraging leamers to participate in the modification and adaptation of their own leaming programme. Creation refers to the step in which leamers establish their own goals and create their own leaming tasks. Finally, autonomous leamers make links between the classroom and the real world by moving beyond the formal instructional context to real life; this last step is called transcendence.

Considenng that the degree of autonomy is gradual, we can talk about the concept of autonomization for leamers and teachers. This process, which provides them with opportunities to be involved in leaming to leam what goes on in the language classroom, means:

1. Leaming to reflect on attitudes towards leaming and personal leaming expenences.
2. Leaming to select leaming and communicative goals.
3. Leaming to select specific tasks related to the goal.
4. Leaming to organise time and matenals to achieve the goals.
5. Leaming to select and use appropriate leaming and teaching strategies
6. Leaming to assess and monitor the leaming and teaching progress regularly.
7. Learning to understand that reflective leaming and teaching are necessary in a context sensitive pedagogy.

Finally, a reflective approach towards language teaching and leaming will result in accepting the need for language teachers to undergo professional preparation to enable them to conduct research in their classrooms. Before conducting classroom research it will be necessary to prepare language teachers to conduct observational research using methods from observational schemes, to action research projects or to develop classroom interaction analysis in collaboration with university researchers. Such professional preparation will help language teachers to explore language teaching and leaming in their own classrooms. ln this sense, participants' engaging in pedagogic exploration either individually or collaboratively is crucial. Individually, teachers might engage in action research for the purpose of improving their own classroom practices and in terms of obtaining pedagogical changes. Additionally, teachers and leamers can also be involved in participatory classroom research, by identifying researchable questions, using investigative methods, interpreting the results, and deciding how they should be used. Both action research and participatory classroom research share a concem for observation, reflection and action in educational contexts as essential elements towards pedagogic exploration and improvement. Both approaches might be questioned about their objectivity and generalisability. However, this cannot be considered to be a limitation in a context sensitive pedagogy, since there is no attempt to generalise the results to other contexts. On the contrary, reflective teaching aims to combine teachers' professional development to cope with particular teaching situations with leamers' improvement in their performance of their leaming tasks. Besides, a reflective approach towards language teaching and leaming might illustrate the value of qualitative research and its contributions to a better understanding and interpretation of experimental studies on language teaching and leaming. To achieve this, the challenge would be to

develop classroom research into a sustained and systematic activity where small-scale research studies could be carried out, using altematives to parametric statistics.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account that applied linguistics mediates between theory and practice in language leaming, this paper calls for the need to consider research on language use and leaming through communication as a basis for language teaching. It is argued that, in spite of the criticisms of CLT, research on the nature of language and language learning has provided language teachers the opportunity to further understand the principles of CLT, and to translate them into their teaching practice. In relation to research on language in use in naturally occurring contexts, it has helped to define the concept of cornmunicative competence and to identify the linguistic content of CLT. In the same vein, the increasing understanding of language use in speech and writing has influenced the teaching of oral and written skills.

Research on language leaming has analysed whether the CLT approach, where emphasis is placed on language leaming through cornmunication, is valid when its main principles are translated into classroom practice. In this sense, research has shown that factors such as input, task design and focus on form may facilitate the acquisition of a second language. Besides, it has also been suggested that language teaching must take into account individual factors and adjust language teaching to learners' needs and goals.

ln conclusion, we claim that CLT is valid to set the goals in language leaming, but we also suggest the need to find altemative methodological options for specific educational contexts. Secondly, we believe that these options should be based on research in applied linguistics and adjusted to cope with the realities in the classroom. Thirdly, we point out that such adjustment must be based on reflective teaching whose focus is on teacher development. In other words, in reflective teaching teachers are no longer simply instructors but also consultants and researchers of what happens in particular classroom settings. Reflective practice involves, on the other hand, taking into account research on language leaming and, on the other hand, making possible for teachers to investigate their own research questions in their classrooms. This might also result in critical reflection on leaming by encouraging language leamers to further understand their beliefs and assumptions on language leaming. Finally, exploring language classrooms offers new roles for teachers and leamers, since it might be understood as a challenge for professional and leaming development.

NOTES

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