

From the Traditional to the Contemporary in Second Language Teaching and Learning

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It is clear that there have been some dramatic developments in language teaching in recent years. We have reconceptualized the nature of language, re-evaluated the role of the learner within the learning process, and generated new insights into instructed second language acquisition. Together, these developments have led to an increasingly sophisticated view of second language teaching and learning.

Our greatest challenge now is not to throw out well established practices, as so often happened in the past, but to incorporate new ways of doing things into existing practice. In this sense, change will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. One of the things holding us back as a profession over many years has been the 'pendulum' effect in which fashions have swung wildly from one extreme to another. By linking developments in language teaching firmly to the educational mainstream, and by testing out new ideas critically, we should reach a phase in the evolution of the profession in which we are not ashamed to admit to merit in past practices, while, at the same time, being able to acknowledge that significant improvements are necessary.

Insights from theory and research have led to some fundamental changes in our beliefs about the nature of language and learning, and that this has led inevitably to a change in the ways in which we go about the business of language teaching. However, as I have already indicated, I believe that current trends are basically evolutionary rather than revolutionary in nature, as methodologists and curriculum developers seek to add value to tried and tested practices rather than to subvert or reject them out of hand.

In this chapter, I will show how contemporary trends have added value to practice, or have prompted a reassessment and reevaluation of practice in the areas of syllabus design, approaches to teaching, the role of the learner, approaches to language, the role of texts, resources and approaches to learning, classroom organization and assessment.

The chapter deals with the following issues and concepts

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- relevance of language learning to general education

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- linguistic specification as second-order activity

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Stimuli for change

Ineffectiveness of traditional approaches

A perennial stimulus for change in language education has been a dissatisfaction with the results obtained by 'traditional' methods, often at great cost to schools and language systems, and the expenditure of tremendous effort by students and teachers. In grammar-translation classrooms, learners typically spent years learning English and yet many of them were still unable to use the language effectively. They often knew a good deal about the language but were unable to use this knowledge to communicate appropriately. In systems where grammar-translation gave way to audiolingualism, students were able to parrot responses in predictable situations of use, but had difficulty communicating effectively in the relatively unpredictable world beyond the classroom.

Many concluded that it was a poor investment if all that work seemed to offer so little practical result. Students had a basic foundation of language knowledge but they do not know how to put that knowledge to active use. To help them to communicate and use that language knowledge, it was gradually recognized and accepted that a new approach to language learning and teaching was needed. Learners needed to understand that language is not just a list of grammatical patterns and a collection of words. Language as communication involves the active use of grammar and vocabulary to listen and read effectively and to speak with and write to other people. Language needs to be learned functionally so that learners are able to see that different forms communicate different meanings.

One response to the perception that language educators are relatively ineffective, was to question the value of learning another language. I would challenge that perception. I believe that language learning should have a central place in any educational system. If we accept what Pinker (1994) and his colleagues have to say, then language is arguably the defining characteristic of the human species, and a knowledge of language in general, as well as an ability to use one's first, and at least one other language, should be one of the defining characteristics of the educated individual. As the bumper sticker says: "Monolingualism is curable!" In a world that is increasingly intermeshed economically, environmentally and electronically, the ability to communicate effectively is crucial.

Relevance of language teaching to general education

It is only through language that we can communicate with each other, share our ideas, tell people what we have experienced, express our wishes and desires, solve complex problems by drawing on information we read or hear, and, above all, communicate in the workplace and across cultures with people from other countries. To achieve these objectives, however, we need to learn language as communication not just as a list of facts to be memorised or a set of symbols to be manipulated. This, as we saw earlier has been an important force in the evolution of a new approach to language learning, one which begins from this active use of language and which involves learners in co-operative learning tasks using language, helped by their teachers and specially designed learning materials. This is a central aim of contemporary approaches to language teaching.

The skills developed through the application of active, co-operative learning principles can flow through to other subjects as well. Effective foreign language learning produces learners with the social and cognitive problem solving skills that can be deployed in other subjects on the school

curriculum. If only we could get language teachers and subject teachers communicating with each other, it might be possible to fashion a new type of school curriculum, one in which the familiar elements are not jettisoned, but recombined. Then, the relevance of the intellectual knowledge, learning skills, interpersonal development and intercultural sensitivities fostered in the language classroom might be appreciated by others with a vested interest in education.

Syllabus design

Traditionally, the field of curriculum development has been divided into syllabus design, methodology, and evaluation (Tyler 1949). Syllabus design has to do with selecting and sequencing content, methodology with selecting and sequencing appropriate learning experiences, and evaluation with appraising learners and determining the effectiveness of the curriculum as a whole.

Difficulty of separating content and process in a communicative syllabus

Syllabus

A syllabus consists of lists of content to be taught in a course of study. Key tasks for the syllabus designer are the selection of the items, and their sequencing and integration.

In writings on second language teacher education, it is possible to identify two views on the nature of syllabus design. The narrow view draws a clear distinction between the selection and sequencing of content (the domain of syllabus design) and the selection and sequencing of learning tasks and activity (the domain of methodology). With the emergence of CLT has come a group of curriculum specialists who take a broader view, and they question the sustainability of this strict separation.

In general education, Stenhouse (1975) changed all that with a compelling rationale for the elevation of process (traditionally the domain of methodology) to the same status as content. His ideas found their way into language education through people such as Mike Breen (1984) and Leo van Lier (1988). (These developments are described in some detail in my 1989 book on syllabus design.) Breen used the metaphor of the journey to describe his approach to language teaching. Traditionally, he argued, content was seen as the destination (“we want learners to know how to contrast the simple past and present perfect tenses”). Methodology was the route - the means whereby we reach the destination (“we’ll learners to do a set of substitution drills involving present perfect and simple past”). However, with the emergence of new views on the nature of language teaching, and a reconceptualization of what it was to know and use the language, this separation was difficult to sustain. With the emergence of a communicative, skills-based approach (“we want learners to be able to give an informal oral presentation on a subject of their choice”), a rigid separation became difficult to sustain because, if our method of achieving the target performance is to rehearse that performance in class, then the route *becomes* the destination. This reconceptualization changed the way that course designers and materials writers go about their jobs.

In traditional language teaching, syllabus design issues (what students learn), and methodology (how they learn), were decided with reference to the classroom rather than with reference to learners' real communicative needs in actual situations in the world outside. As a result, learners often had difficulty using what they have learned beyond the classroom. With grammar-translation and audiolingual drills, it was often difficult for learners to make the conceptual leap from the classroom to genuine communication outside the classroom. This is not to say that drills of various kinds, and even translation tasks, have no place in the language classrooms, rather, that in and of themselves, they are insufficient.

Linguistic specification as a second order activity

In classrooms underpinned by the principles set out in chapter 1, and the research described in Chapter 2, the syllabus designer begins by choosing language content and learning experiences which match the needs of learners as users of language beyond the classroom. In designing courses they are guided by specified communicative tasks that learners can perform at the end of their period of learning. In consequence, it is easier for learners to apply what they have learned in class to the challenge of communicating in the real world, and for employers to know what learners can do. In practical terms, the syllabus designer no longer begins with a structurally graded list of linguistic items, and then casts around for ways of teaching those items. Instead, he / she begins with an inventory of target skills and asks what learners need to know and be able to do in order to perform those skills. Listing, sequencing and integrating target items becomes a second order activity rather than the first thing that he / she does.

Approach to teaching

Transmission versus interpretation models of learning

In traditional language classrooms, learners are taught chiefly about language and its rules. They learn facts about language rather than how to use it communicatively to express ideas, to talk and write to other people, to read and listen to real language and to learn how to cooperate with others. As we saw in Chapter 1, in educational systems functioning under a transmission model, the primary role of the learner is as a relatively passive recipient of knowledge. The teacher's role is to provide that knowledge by transmitting it to the learner, largely through lock-step, teacher-fronted modes of learning.

High-structure versus low-structure teaching

In a book on the management of the teaching process that I co-authored some years ago, a distinction was drawn between 'high-structure' and 'low-structure' teaching. Generally speaking, classrooms informed by current communicative views on language pedagogy will involve a change in teaching approach away from a high-structure orientation towards a more low-structure orientation. The impact of changing views about the nature of language on the teaching process we described in the following way:

The insight that communication was an integrated process rather than a set of discrete learning outcomes created a dilemma for language education. It meant that the destination (functioning in another language) and the route (attempting to learn the target language) move much closer together, and, in some instances (for example, in role plays and simulations), become indistinguishable. ... In educational terms, a useful way of viewing this emerging dilemma in language education is in terms of high- and low-structure teaching. High-structure tasks are those in which teachers have all the power and control. Low-structure tasks are those in which power and control are devolved to the students. ... [we believe that] an association exists between low-structure and CLT, and that the incorporation of communicative tasks with low-structure implications into the classroom increases the complexity of the decision-making process for the teacher. (Nunan and Lamb 1996: 16 - 17)

High-structure versus low-structure teaching

High-structure teaching situations are those in which the teacher is in control of the instructional process. In these situations, learners have relatively little power or control over either the content or process of instruction. Low-structure situations, on the other hand, provide learners with many options and a great deal of autonomy. According to Biggs and Telfer (1993: 362) all instructional decision-making can be located on a 'continuum' of structure. High-structure has 'high-structure' decisions at one extreme, and 'low-structure' decisions at the other.

In contemporary classrooms, while direct instruction and high-structure tasks are not eschewed, much more time will be devoted to low-structure tasks. In addition, direct instruction, when it occurs, will be integrated into instructional sequences in which learners are actively involved in using the language guided and helped by their teachers. The teacher's primary role is the provision of pedagogical opportunities through which learners might structure and restructure their own understanding. The ultimate goal is to enable the learner to communicate with others in the world beyond the classroom where they will not have a teacher on hand. In helping learners achieve this goal, however, teachers need to redefine their approach to teaching.

Role of the learners

Passive versus active language roles

As indicated in the preceding section, learners in classrooms characterized by a transmission model of learning, are cast in a relative passive role. They are passengers, being carried forward in the learning experience by the teacher. In language classrooms operating within such a transmission mode, learners practice patterns provided by teachers, textbooks and tapes. They are thus cast into passive, reproductive roles. Rather than learning how to use language creatively themselves, they spend most learning time copying and reproducing language written down by others. They learn how to communicate in model and predictable situations, but they don't learn how to respond appropriately in novel and authentic communicative situations. Such a drill-based pedagogical culture is most commonly associated with audiolingualism, and, although audiolingualism is supposedly dead and buried, the drill-based culture is very much alive and well, as is evident in most so-called communicative curricula.

Reproductive language tasks

The following task, adapted from a recent textbook, is an example of a task that is purportedly a communicative exercise, but is, in reality, a reproductive exercise practicing comparative adjectives.

Instructions: Working with a partner, take turns asking and answering these questions. If you agree on the answer, circle the word. If you disagree, put your initials next to the answer that you think is correct.

Example: Q: Which is taller, the Sears Building, or the Empire State Building?
 A: The Sears Building is taller.

1. Which has more sides, a pentagon or a rectangle?
2. Which country has more cars per person, Taiwan or Japan?
3. Which is closer to the equator, Singapore or Malaysia?
4. Which is bigger, the Earth or the Moon?
5. Which country has the larger population, Pakistan or the U.S.A.?
6. Which country has more television sets per person, Australia or Singapore?
7. Which planet is closer to the Earth, Venus or Mars?
8. Which is an older capital city, Madrid or Rome?

As I have indicated several times already, there is nothing wrong with drills, and there is certainly nothing wrong with exercises such as the one above. They are an essential ingredient in the learning process for most learners, and provide the enabling skills for later communicative performance. However, by themselves, they do not go far enough in equipping learners to communicate. In addition to reproducing language models provided by others, even in disguised forms such as the task above, learners need opportunities for creative language use. By creativity, do not mean that we should have learners writing poetry in class (although I do feel that the use of imaginative literature could be exploited much more extensively than it is). Rather, by creativity, I mean the recombination of familiar elements into new, and previously unrehearsed forms.

Encouraging creative language use

In a classrooms and textbooks in which the creativity principle is activated, learners are give structured opportunities to use the language that they have been practicing in new and unexpected ways. They are provided with the language that they will need to take part in genuine communicative tasks, and they are given opportunities to respond appropriately in new situations in the world outside the classroom. Tasks allow learners to practise identifying the key grammar and vocabulary in real-world texts and to develop the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in an integrated way, just as in authentic communicative situations. Tasks also give learners practice in co-operating with other learners and with their teachers, making creative use of the language they have learned. In this way, classrooms themselves act as a bridge to the outside world rather than as a linguistic quarantine station where learners are protected from the risks involved in having to engage in genuine communication.

Creative language use

Creative language use involves the recombination of familiar elements (words, structures, and prefabricated patterns) in new ways to produce utterances that have never been produced before by particular individual (For that individual, they are therefore unique.) In role plays, simulations, and problem solving tasks, learners are given opportunities for creative language use.

Understanding learner roles is crucial to an understanding of problems and potential solutions in contemporary language classrooms (see, for example, Wright, 1987). In Chapter 5, we shall look in greater depth at the relationship between roles and tasks, and will explore ways in which learners themselves can be encouraged to redefine their roles.

Approach to language

Shortcomings of grammar-translation and audiolingualism

Grammar-translation and audiolingualism adopted very different approaches to the treatment of grammar. In fact, audiolingualism developed partly in reaction to grammar-translations excessively deductive approach to the teaching of grammar. Audiolingual methodology was based on an inductive approach in which rules were ‘caught’ rather than ‘taught’. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). “Get students to learn by analogy, not analysis”, “Language is a set of habits”, and “Teach the language, not about the language”, were pedagogical catchcries when audiolingualism was in full swing (Moulton, 1963).

Despite their marked differences, grammar translation and audiolingualism did share one thing in common. They both separated the teaching of grammatical form from communicative meaning. In grammar-translation classrooms, grammar was taught as a set of rules to be memorised and repeated.

In audiolingual classrooms, learners

Audiolingualism

Of all modern methods of teaching languages, audiolingualism has undoubtedly had the greatest impact. In fact, it is still the most influential method in use today. Numerous principles underpinned audiolingualism, although the most important contributions are probably the following:

1. Language learning is a process of habit formation.
2. Teachers show teach the language, they should not talk about the language.

are expected to come to an inductive understanding of the rule through processes of analogy. In both approaches, it was difficult for learners to make connections between different parts of the grammatical system. It was also difficult to see how to apply the grammar they had learned to communicate. Words were usually learned as individual items in lists so that learners do not develop an understanding of how they are grouped by their meanings into semantic sets.

The other thing that both grammar-translation and audiolingualism shared was an assumption that acquiring a second language was a linear process, that learners learn one item at a time, mastering the simple items first, and then moving on, in a step-by-step fashion to more complex items.

however, as we saw in Chapter 2, this is an oversimplification (and, in some ways, a misrepresentation) of the way that second language grammar is actually acquired. Learners do not learn one thing, perfectly, one at a time. They learning numerous things imperfectly at the same time. They structure and restructure their understanding of the language in complex non-linear ways that we shall explore in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Teaching grammar communicatively

In a teaching methodology that reflects what we currently know about second language acquisition, grammar and vocabulary are taught communicatively. Grammatical patterns are matched to particular communicative meanings so that learners can see the connection between form and function. Learners learn how to choose the right pattern to express the ideas and feelings that they want to express. They learn how to use grammar to express different communicative meanings. Words are grouped meaningfully and are taught through tasks involving semantic networking, concept mapping and classifying. Such a methodology enables learners to recombine the familiar in unique ways and thus achieve the creativity in language use that I described in the preceding section.

Using language texts

In traditional classrooms, learners listen to and read specially written classroom texts. These texts are usually produced by textbook writers and teachers to exemplify particular grammatical points, or to teach core vocabulary items. For example, the following text is designed to teach prepositions of place (*next to*, *across from*, *between*) existential *there*, and core vocabulary associated with neighborhoods, and it is difficult to imagine a context other than a language teaching textbook in which the text could conceivably appear.

Jane's apartment building is in the center of town. Jane is very happy because there because the building is in a very convenient place.

Across from the building, there's a laundromat, a bank, and a post office. Next to the building, there's a drug store and a restaurant. Around the corner from the building, there are two gas stations.

There's a lot of noise near Jane's apartment building. There are a lot of cars on the street, and there are a lot of people walking on the sidewalk all day and night.

Jane isn't very upset about the noise, though. Her building is in the center of town. It's a very busy place, but for Jane, it's a very convenient place to live. (Molinsky and Bliss 1989: 58).

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, there is nothing wrong in introducing texts such as these into the classroom. They demonstrate target language items within controlled contexts. However, I do have a problem with the notion that students should be fed an exclusive diet of such texts, because they do not give learners first-hand experience of how language is used in genuine communicative situations beyond the classrooms. Learners who only ever encounter texts such as this frequently have difficulty understanding the language and the texts that are used by speakers and writers authentically in the real world. The reasons for this were pointed in Chapter 1 (see the section on task-based language teaching), and I shall not rehearse them here.

Authenticity

In my own teaching, learners study spoken written texts brought into the classroom from authentic contexts outside the classroom. In learners are strongly encouraged to bring in their own samples of authentic language data. They practice listening to and reading genuine language drawn from a wide variety of contexts, including audio and radio broadcasts,

Authenticity
Authentic texts are those that have been produced in the course of genuine communication, not specially written for the purposes of language teaching. They provide learners with opportunities to experience language as it is used in the real world outside the classroom.
Of course, there is a great deal of language generated in the classroom itself that is authentic, and this can very well be used for pedagogical purposes.

conversations, discussions and meetings of all kinds, talks, and announcements. They read magazines, stories, printed material and instructions, hotel brochures and airport notices, bank instructions and a wide range of written messages. This practice helps them cope successfully with genuine communication outside the classroom.

While the learners that I currently teach are at upper-intermediate levels of proficiency, exercises and tasks help even the learners at the lower levels to make sense of these real texts, and to develop effective learning strategies for reading and for listening, speaking and writing. Some years ago, when writing a series, aimed at beginning and post-beginning learners, I was able to draw on a wide variety of authentic data, including the following:

SPOKEN DATA

- casual conversations
- telephone conversations
- answering machine messages
- office conversations
- public announcements
- stories and anecdotes
- oral histories
- descriptions
- directions
- store announcements
- advertisements
- interviews

WRITTEN DATA

- invitations
- airline tickets
- postcards
- enrollment forms
- business cards
- family trees
- classified advertisements
- airline boarding passes
- licences
- handwritten notes
- movie reviews
- maps
- business letters
- menus

Student generated data

With appropriate guidance and support, even low level learners can benefit from opportunities to work with everyday spoken and written texts such as these. Older learners can be given a greater sense of ownership and control over their own learning by being encouraged to bring their own authentic data into the classroom. Bringing authentic data into the classroom can assist learner to see how grammatical forms operate in context to enable speakers and writers to make communicative

meanings. Another advantage of using authentic data is that learners encounter target language items in the kinds of contexts that they naturally occur, rather than in contexts that have been concocted by a textbook writer. Ultimately, this assists the learner because he / she will experience the language item in interaction with other closely related grammatical and discoursal elements. By distorting the contexts of use within which grammatical items occur, non-authentic language in some respects actually makes the task for the language learner more difficult.

Facilities for learning

In traditional classrooms, learners usually have to rely only on the textbook as an aid to language learning. Often these textbooks are not especially well supported by interesting visuals and supporting material, and rapidly become boring and uninteresting to the learner.

Textbooks and support resources

In contemporary approaches to language teaching, the design of textbooks has become much more sophisticated. The incorporation of realia and authentic data brings the content to life, and helps learners make connections between the classroom world, and the world beyond the classroom. In addition to classroom texts, published textbook series these days typically contain self-study workbooks, cassette tapes, and videotaped materials which bring the real world into the classroom. For example, the highly innovative Grammar Dimensions (Larsen-Freeman, 1995) which introduces a new approach to the teaching of grammar, contains the following components in addition to the Student Text:

instructor's manual

audio tape

student workbooks

tests

World Wide Web site for interactive grammar and writing.

Information technology and the Internet

Increasingly, access to the Internet also brings the world into the classroom. Students can access and even download a wide range of informative, educational and entertainment information. They can also establish contact with other first and second speakers of English around the world through chat lines and pen pal links. In addition to increasing their intercultural awareness and sensitivities, this also provides them with opportunities for genuine beyond the classroom. Such opportunities are not always easy to find in foreign language settings, and so the explosion in Internet usage has been particularly valuable to EFL students. My own learners, once they discover and begin to tap the potential of the Internet and the World Wide Web find it both liberating and empowering. These same students also submit their assignments and class journals to me on e-mail. In the case of the assignments, I can embed comment on their work, and return the assignments to them, without the red ink scribbles that necessitate lengthy, time-consuming, and often wasteful retyping. Having them submit their journals electronically saves class time (in the past, the last ten minutes of each class was devoted to journals), and increases the amount of time that they devote to working on their English out of class.

In his practical introduction to the use of e-mail for English Teaching, Mark Warschauer (1995) gives the following examples of how the e-mail revolution has facilitated teaching and learning:

- In Hungary, students correspond daily on international discussion lists with students from Norway, the U.S., Canada, Korea, Japan, Australia, and Indonesia. They later decide to jointly publish an international student news magazine called *Wings*.
- ESL students in Eugene Oregon, submit their dialogue journals by e-mail rather than on paper. The students communicate much more naturally and frequently this way, and the teacher can respond much more quickly and easily.
- A teacher in New York learns she's teaching a class in English pronunciation for Spanish speakers, but she has no experience in this area. She posts a question via e-mail on an English teachers' list, and within 24 hours a half a dozen colleagues around the world have e-mailed her concrete suggestions.
- ESL pupils and a Washington DC elementary school find keypals (keyboard penpals) in several other states and countries. Their attitude towards writing changes dramatically in 2 months.
- A teacher in Japan would like to teaching the story "Rip Van Winkle" but doesn't have the text. She finds it from home in ten minutes by using her personal computer and a modem connection to the Internet.
- EFL and ESL university students in Finland, Hong Kong, and the U.S. engage in an international competition to find a solution to a real-world environmental problem. They work in international teams to write technical reports, 3-year plans, and abstracts for an international environmental conference, and then vote on the winning entry and post it electronically for others around the world to see. (Warschauer 1995: 2 - 3)

These examples, illustrate how new technologies can help us to activate the experiential, student-centered philosophies described in Chapter 1.

Approach to learning

Learning styles and strategies

In traditional classrooms, learners typically did not learn how to become better language learners on their own once they left a school or college. While they learned how to memorize individual words and grammatical patterns, and to practice them in contrived contexts, the underlying strategies behind the classroom tasks were rarely made explicit. As a result, students rarely learned how to make use of this stored knowledge in an organised and creative way. Ways of learning language better and more effectively was not placed onto the pedagogical agenda, and practice was therefore often unfocussed and not directed at those skills they needed to improve.

Adding a process dimension

As we saw in Chapter 2, a substantial amount of research has now been carried out into learning styles and strategies, and, in classrooms where teachers have been able to draw on this research, their students are able to develop a range of effective language learning strategies. They learn how to read and listen effectively, how to work out what texts mean, how to gather important information, how to work well in co-operation with others, how to use what they know in new and unpredictable situations, how to speak and write appropriately and so on. They also learn meta-cognitive strategies for monitoring and reflecting on their learning (Oxford, 1990). These strategies are explicitly taught as part of the curriculum, and learners are shown how to apply these strategies to their own learning outside the classroom. In this way, they learn how to become better language learners outside of formal language learning contexts. In Chapter 6, in the next part of this book, I shall look at some of the practical techniques that teachers can use to add a learning strategy dimension to their teaching.

Classroom organization

Teacher-fronted versus small group classrooms

As we have seen, the traditional mode of classroom organization is a teacher-fronted one, with learners sitting in rows facing the teacher. They spent most of their time repeating and manipulating models provided by the teacher, the textbook and the tape, and develop skills in choral speaking and repeating. The physical set-up of classrooms were (and, in many schools, still are) predicated on this mode of organization, with desks set out in rows, and even, in many case screwed to the floor, thus making any other mode of organization almost impossible. Students in such classrooms do not learn how to express their own ideas and to share these ideas by communicating in small groups.

In Chapter 1, we saw that experiential learning was underpinned by a constructivist approach to education. such a philosophy is realized at a classroom level by co-operative, task-based learning, with learners working in small groups and pairs. Students become skilled at co-operating with others, and express their own opinions, ideas and feelings, guided by the teacher. They learn how to solve language problems in a systematic way and to decide what language to use in the different situations that their teachers present in the classroom. Role plays and simulations help to make the task-based classroom a lively and rich language environment for learners of all abilities. As we saw in Chapter 2, tasks such as these stimulate the production of a much richer array of language functions than teacher-fronted modes of classroom organization. They also result in the negotiation of meaning, something which is largely absent in teacher -fronted tasks.

Communication in the workplace

Interestingly, these skills of communicating and operating in groups, are also increasingly required in the workplace. Over the last few years, the hierarchical models of production in which communication is a one-way, downward process from line managers to workers on the shop floor, giving way to small, integrated production units in which communication occurs horizontally between members of the team.

Group Work

Group work is essential to any classroom which is based on the principles of experiential learning. Through group work, learners develop their ability to communicate through tasks which require them, within the classroom, to approach and solve a variety of kinds of things they will need to be able to do to communicate in the world beyond the classroom.

However, many educational institutions have not kept pace with changes in the workplace and in society at large. Educational institutions are inherently conservative, and it is probably fair to say that most are still predicated on a transmission mode of education, a mode which, as we have seen, is even reflected in the physical setting of the classroom. Within such institutions there is often an ideological tussle between the dominant, transmission ideology of the institution itself, and the interpretative, constructivist approach advocated by the language teacher.

Assessment

Shortcomings of standardized tests

In traditional learning environments, assessment practices are characterized by standardized tests designed, administered and graded by outside authorities. Teachers have little control of what is assessed, or how it is assessed, and examination systems have a disproportionate influence over curriculum. In such environments, learners do not develop their own ability to assess how much they have learned and how much they need to learn. As a result they often do not know exactly what they have learned and how much they still have to learn. Assessment is typically through quizzes and tests that did not reflect actual language use.

Student self-assessment

In contemporary language teaching, learners are trained systematically in ways of assessing their own learning progress. Learners learn their own strengths better, and where they need more help from the teacher. When they leave the program we can not only

indicate their proficiency level in the language they have been studying, but also provide a profile of their strengths and weaknesses in many other factors that influence effective communication. In this way, learners, parents and employers can see precisely what progress has been made and what communicative tasks learners can successfully carry out. Increasingly, portfolios of work, providing concrete instances of learner achievement, are being accepted by employers and educational institutions. The following example, from *Writing Workout* (Huizenga & Thomas-Ruzic), shows how student-centered records of work can be built up over time.

Assessment and evaluation

In many textbooks on curriculum development, the terms 'assessment' and 'evaluation' are used synonymously. However, I have always drawn a clear distinction between the two concepts. Evaluation, to me, is the collection and interpretation of information about aspects of the curriculum (including learners, teachers, materials, learning arrangements etc.) for decision-making purposes.

Assessment is a sub-component of evaluation. Assessment refers to the tools, techniques and procedures for collecting and interpreting information about what learners can and cannot do. In evaluating one's teaching, it is obviously important to include assessment data. This tells us what learners can and cannot do as a result of the instructional process. However, in order to make sense of this information, and to decide what worked and what did not work, it is important to collect other information which will tell us whether it was the teaching materials, instructional procedures, or some other aspect of the instructional process that needs to be changed.

INSERT : Huizenga & Thomas-Ruzic *Writing Workout* Page 108

These records have a number of purposes. In the first place, they serve to remind learners of the content covered in the unit. Secondly, over time, they provide a record of achievement, as well as reminding learners of work still to be done. Finally, and most importantly, they develop skills in self-assessment and self-evaluation - skills which we saw in Chapter 1, are an important ingredient in a learner-oriented instructional system.

(For a detailed description and inventory of learner-oriented tasks, see Brindley, 1989. See also the special issue of the TESOL Journal on learner assessment).

Language outside of class

In traditional classrooms, learners are rarely encouraged to make use of their language skills in the real world outside. The only practice they have is in class. This, of course, is not surprising in foreign language contexts in which opportunities to use the language are limited. However, as we saw in the preceding chapter, one of the things that characterizes 'good' language learners is their ability to find opportunities to activate their language outside of the classroom.

Strategies for activating language out of class

In contemporary approaches to language teaching, learners are involved in role plays and practice simulations, and through these develop an ability to carry out creative and imaginative learning projects outside of the language classroom. These projects are carefully connected to the kinds of language tasks that they will have to perform when they complete their studies. In this way they develop independence, they learn how to function as communicators themselves and they learn to use language as a working tool to achieve their objectives outside of the classroom. In my own teaching, I try to structure out-of-class learning opportunities for students on a ratio of three to one. In other words, for every hour they spend with me, I try to find ways in which they will spend three hours outside the classroom systematically working on their language. In addition to increasing the overall quantity of language use, this sends the powerful message to the learners that they have power and control over their own learning. It also shows them that, even in foreign language situations, there are many opportunities for them to practice their language. Out-of-class tasks include the following:

- engaging in peer review sessions, in which they collaborate with a fellow student to review projects and assignments;
- conducting dialogue journals with me via the Internet;
- taking part in conversation exchanges with foreigners who want to practice their Chinese (students are paired up with foreigners, and arrange, at their own convenience, to spend forty minutes a week in conversation - twenty minutes in English, and twenty minutes in Chinese);
- projects and surveys, in which they collect information, in English, and bring it back to a subsequent class);
- doing language improvement projects in the independent learning center (in these projects they identify an aspect of their English they want to improve, they formulate a learning objective, and write up a learning contract, which they carry out independently).

(Other ideas for fostering independent learning outside the formal language classroom can be found in Pemberton *et al.* (1996) and Gardner and Miller (1996).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn together the major ideological and empirical themes that emerged in the first two chapters. I have illustrated the changes that have been brought about to pedagogical practice as a result of changing views on the nature of language and learning, and also through the incorporation into classroom teaching of insights from research. We can summarize the changes wrought by changed to theory and practice as follows:

- learners practice skills they will need outside of the classroom
- learners are actively involved in using the language they are learning, and in learning through doing
- learners communicate authentically and learn to use language appropriately
- learners learn how to use grammar and vocabulary to express different communicative meanings
- learners listen to and read authentic texts of different kinds
- learners develop strategies to become better language learners
- learners work together in small co-operative groups
- learners develop skills in self-assessment and self-evaluation
- learners learn how to take their language into the real world beyond the classroom
- teachers help learners to learn useful language and to become better learners
- teachers provide native-speaker models of the language they are learning and share their knowledge of workplace tasks
- teachers actively cooperate in providing a varied program of instruction
- teachers continuously assess learners' performance and provide a detailed profile of their skills

In short, task-based language teaching helps learners to learn real language for use in the real world. Learners are assessed on what they can communicate and on their skills as language learners, as solvers of problems, and as communicators in groups. As a result, teachers, parents and employers know what skills learners have, and can match learners' abilities to the demands of particular tasks and jobs. Task-based language teaching is more than just a means of learning a language. It's a way of becoming a better communicator in the workplace, and in the social world beyond the classroom.

The following table summarizes the major shifts that have taken place in language pedagogy over the last thirty years.

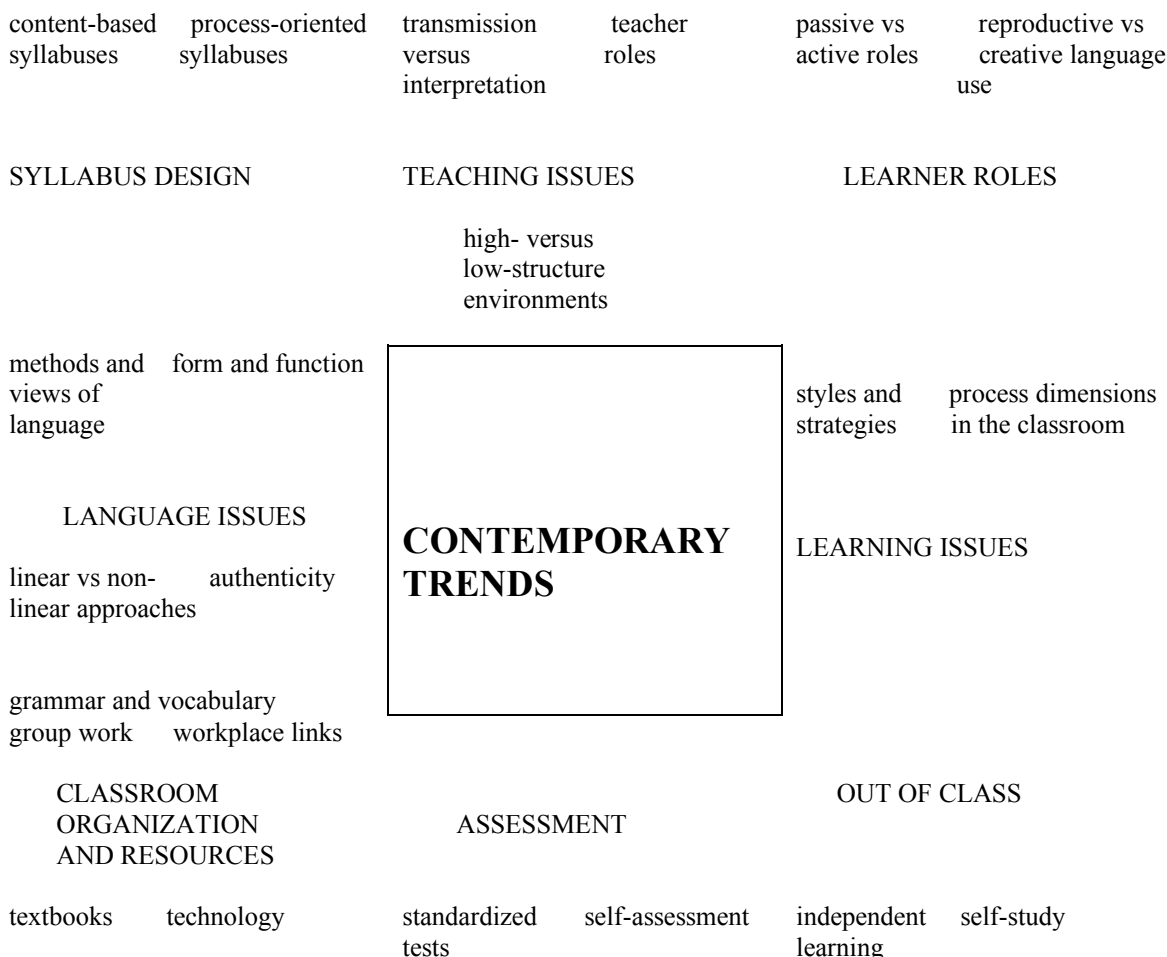
Table 3.1: The traditional and the contemporary in language education

	TRADITIONAL	CONTEMPORARY <i>In addition to the features set out in the left-hand column,</i>
<i>Syllabus design</i>	Content & methodology decided with reference to the classroom rather than with reference to learners' real communicative needs.	Content & methodology match learner needs beyond the classroom.
<i>Approach to teaching(methodology)</i>	Learners are taught about language and its rules, learning facts about language rather than how to use it communicatively.	Learners are actively involved in using language.
<i>Role of the learners</i>	Learners spend their time copying and reproducing language written down by others.	Learners learn how to use language creatively, responding in novel and authentic communicative situations.
<i>Approach to language</i>	Grammar is taught as rules to be memorised.	Grammar and vocabulary are taught communicatively so learners can use the grammar to express different communicative meanings.
<i>Using language texts</i>	Learners listen to and read specially written classroom texts. They have difficulty	Learners study authentic texts and learn to use genuine language outside the classroom.
<i>Resources for learning</i>	Learners have to rely only on the textbook as an aid to language learning.	Learners specially written, well-illustrated textbook plus self-study workbooks, cassette tapes, and videotaped materials.
<i>Approach to learning</i>	Learners don't learn how to become better language learners on their own.	Learners learn a range of effective language learning strategies and are shown how to apply these strategies to their own learning outside the classroom.

<i>Classroom organization</i>	Learners sit in rows facing the teacher and spend most of their time repeating what the teacher says. They don't learn how to express their own ideas.	Learners work in small groups and pairs, learning skills of co-operating with others and how to express their own opinions, ideas and feelings.
<i>Assessment</i>	Teacher alone assesses the student's progress. Learners do not develop ability to assess what they have learned.	Learners trained to assess their own learning progress, and can identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

In summary, the ideology driving the view of education presented here is that learners have a right to be involved in curriculum decision-making, that is, selecting content, selecting learning activities and tasks. It is also predicated on a belief that learners learn best if the content relates to their own experience and knowledge. At the level of implementation, there is a belief that learners who have developed skills in 'learning how to learn' are the most effective students, and that learners have different learning styles and strategies which need to be taken into consideration in developing learning programs.

Concept map of Chapter 3



Questions and tasks

1. What was the major conceptual shift brought about by Stenhouse to the field of syllabus design?
2. List three characteristics of a 'high structure' classroom, and three characteristics of a 'low structure' classroom.
3. What is the essential difference between a 'reproductive' and a 'creative' learning task?
4. Why is it desirable to introduce learners to authentic data? List ten sources of authentic data in your current teaching situation.
5. What media in addition to commercial texts are you using / do you have the potential to use in your current teaching situation?
6. Identify three ways in which learning strategies could be integrated into your current teaching situation.
7. Identify three impediments to group work in your teaching situation, and brainstorm solutions to these.
8. List and discuss three ways in which your students can activate their language skills out of class.
9. Collect samples of authentic data and use them as the basis for designing tasks for low-level learners. If possible, introduce the tasks in the classroom, and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

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