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**Approaches to Communicative
Foreign Language Teaching**

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Approaches to Communicative Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract

In this paper, a brief description is given for some influential approaches to foreign languages (FL) teaching. The proposals for communicative FL teaching fall into two major groups. The group of early approaches covers developments in syllabus design and teaching methodology, while the second group (recent approaches) deals with the issue of teaching methodology.

Acknowledging that the knowledge required to achieve communicative competence must include static knowledge, (language system), and dynamic knowledge, (language use). Thus, foreign language teaching (FLT) must aim at achieving and promoting both aspects of knowledge in the learners.

In this regard, it is a challenge to FL pedagogy to devise an approach to meet both needs. In order to achieve both objectives, the content of the syllabus and the teaching methodology must be taken into consideration.

It is possible to bridge the gap between the knowledge of the language system and its use. It is important that classroom FL teaching offers opportunities for acquisition of explicit knowledge of communicative interaction for the purpose of automatizing knowledge. Form-focused aspect will contribute to strengthening the learner's analysed declarative knowledge, which in turn facilitates the process of proceduralizing in real interacting.

Keywords: Communication, Approaches, Foreign language, Interlanguage pragmatics

Introduction

During the 1970s and the 1980s communication, communicative competence and communicative language teaching have become key concepts in foreign language pedagogy. Influenced by research in language 1 (L1) acquisition which showed that children learn their first language in the process of communication, the emphasis on communication advocated during 1970s by pioneers of communicative approach, (e.g. Jakobovits 1970; Savignon 1972; and Rivers 1972). On the other hand, argued that the skill-getting practice of the audio-lingual method was insufficient. In a landmark paper entitled "Talking off the tops of their heads" (Rivers, 1968), she pointed out the importance of skill-using opportunities. A combination of medium-oriented, (formal, and message-oriented), i.e. communicative practice was advocated.

The basic point was that in order for language learning to take place successfully, the learner should be involved in real communication as a user of language 2 (L2) rather than as a detached observer who analyses and researches the language of later use.

Attempts have been made to incorporate in the curriculum elements of communication that resemble authentic direct experience.

In addition, alternative approach rooted in L2 learning theory is also presented. Littlewood (1982) suggests that the learner's work with FL progresses from part skills to whole skills. Brumfit (1984) points out the distinction between "accuracy" and "fluency". Ellis (1985, 1988, and 1990) stresses with the notions of "controlled practice" and "free practice along with the notions of "form-focused instruction" and "meaning-focused instruction". When discussing the notions of "accuracy-work" and "fluency-work" and "controlled practice" and "free practice", the focus is on learner activities, whereas the distinction between "form-focused" and "meaning-focused" instruction is viewed from the perspective of teaching.

Some Approaches to Communicative FL Teaching

In the following, a brief description is given of some influential approaches to FL teaching. The proposals for communicative FL teaching fall into two major groups.

The first group (early approaches) illustrates developments in syllabus design and teaching methodology. The second group (recent approaches) addresses itself mostly to the issue of teaching methodology.

The Early Approaches to Communicative FL Teaching

The Notional Syllabus

The notional syllabus consists of semantic categories and functions which are linked to specific situations. The linguistic forms of this type of syllabus are derived from predictions of the learner's semantic needs, i.e.; linguistic

considerations are subordinate to semantic/functional ones and a high priority is given to the learner's communicative needs.

This notional categories fall into three groups corresponding to the three layers of meaning of an utterance (Wilkins, 1976:221-254):

1. The semantic of grammatical categories.
2. The categories of communicative functions.
3. The categories of modality.

According to Wilkins, a notional syllabus, based on needs, has three advantages:

1. When the items of the semantic syllabus are included because of their immediate relevance to the learner's communicative needs, FL teaching which is based on this type of syllabus will be more efficient than FL teaching which covers the entire grammatical system regardless of the fact that not all its parts are relevant to the learner's needs (Wilkins, 1976:8-19).
2. Notional syllabus enables the learner's to appreciate the relevance of an FL course and thus increases his /her motivation, while FL teaching based on a grammatical syllabus focuses on the form of language at the cost of language use. (Wilkins, 1976:10-13, 19).
3. As opposed to the grammatical syllabus, focusing on grammatical competence, the notional syllabus will develop communicative competence in the learner because it takes into account the language use and the communicative properties of language (Wilkins 1976:8-19)

Analytic/Synthetic Teaching Strategy

Wilkins (1976:55-58) extends the range of applicability in the notional syllabus. He advocates the notional syllabus on pedagogical grounds, claiming that it represents an "analytic", rather than "synthetic" teaching strategy.

Realizing a distinction between a synthetic approach to syllabus design (grammatical syllabus) and an analytic approach (situational and notional syllabus), Wilkins (1976:1-3) defines a synthetic approach as one which gives priority to grammatical considerations, the analytic approach, on the other hand, organizes the content of FL.

Thus, teaching material based on an analytic syllabus, as opposed to materials derived from a synthetic syllabus, will be linguistically heterogeneous and hence compatible with authentic language use which is structurally varied.

In fact, the notional situational approach may be questionable. In principle, if the learner's needs are assessed, this may be a sound basis for syllabus design. However, it may be difficult to make accurate predictions of the communicative needs of learners using an FL for a specific purpose, but it goes without saying that this is particularly difficult, if not impossible, for learners

who take general FL courses, and in this sense they need analysis principles is a misguided starting point for FL teaching. In this connection, Widdowson-Brumfit (1981:206) point out that the assumption that it is possible to predict the learner's communicative needs conflicts with the creative aspect of language: In this connection, Widdowson-Brumfit (1981: 206) point out that the assumption that it is possible to predict the learner's communicative needs is at odds with the creative aspects of language.

The notional syllabus has also been criticized on the grounds that it fails to develop an awareness of the communicative potential of linguistic forms:

...what is important for the learner is not to know what correlations are common between certain forms and functions, but how such correlations and innumerable others can be established and interpreted in the actual business of communicative interaction. (Widdowson 1978:249)

In fact according to Johnson (1979b:212), the proponents of the notional syllabus can be criticized for tacitly subscribing to a simplistic, behaviorist (habit-formation through stimulus-response learning) view of language use, because the notional syllabus is in essence an attempt to establish compatibility between linguistic features and semantic categories without regard to their communicative potential.

Breen (1983:60-16) criticized this notional syllabus as a collection of form/function correlates for being relatively unpredictable relationship between form and function. This approach is also criticized for grounds that it covers only four components specified in communicative competence which are notions, functions, modal categories and linguistic realization i.e. ignoring communicative and skills competence.

Brumfit (1979:184) and Johnson (1979a:195-197) also criticized Wikins' approach concerning the distinction between synthetic and analytic teaching strategies. They said that there is no justification for characterizing a notional syllabus as more analytic the less synthetic than a grammatical one and thus for claiming that there is a difference in kind of principle between them with respect to this distinction.

A grammatical syllabus requires the learner to resynthesize the grammatical system but leaves him/her to his/her own devices in analyzing the communicative value or function of a given grammatical form. While a semantic notional syllabus forces the learner to resynthesize semantic/functional units and analyze them grammatically. Regarding this similarities, it seems reasonable to characterize the difference as a matter of emphasis – a matter of going priority to grammatical of notional considerations in syllabus design.

It can be concluded that replacing the grammatical syllabus with a notional one is not a sufficient condition for the achievement of a communicative orientation. Teaching methodology rather than syllabus design is the criterion for communicative FL teaching.

The Methodological Approach

Methodological approaches deal with the process of FLT, learning itself. Johnson (1979a:198-199,203) holds the view that the methodological component is the major factor in determining whether or not an FL course is worthy of receiving the predicate communicative aspect. Stressing that communicative methodology must take into account the complex nature of communicative skill. Johnson argues that such a methodology must replicate, as far as possible, the processes of natural communication, if the learner is to develop such skills. This is how Johnson describes the complex nature of the communicative skills:

"Apart from being grammatical, the utterance must also be appropriate on many levels at the same time; it must conform to the speaker's aim, to the role relationships between the interactants, to the setting, topic, and linguistic context....etc. The speaker must also produce his utterance within severe constraints; he does not know in advance what will be said to him (and hence what his utterance will be a response to) yet, if the conversation is not to flag, he must respond extremely quickly. The rapid formulation of utterance, which is simultaneously 'right' on several levels is central to the (spoken) communicative skill. (Johnson 1981:11)

In order to stimulate all the essential processes which are carried out in natural communication, Johnson proposes that classroom activities approximate natural communication. He derives a communicative methodology from an analysis of the salient features of natural communication by listing three features applicable to a communicative methodology. I shall refer to these features in my presentation.

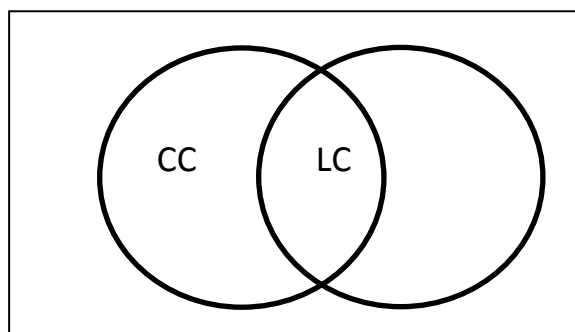
As a conclusion, a communicative methodology consists of relatively uncontrolled task-oriented activities in which the learner bridges an information gap and chooses the form which most appropriately serves his/her communicative purpose. Such activities simulate natural communication closely viewed as whole-task-practice.

Allwright's (1976:167-168) approach is very similar to that of Johnson's. Allwright claims that classroom activities should simulate natural communication in non-educational settings and to achieve this aim he proposes a minimal teaching strategy.

He pointed out that linguistic competence forms part of the communicative competence and by that learners will develop most areas of linguistic competence automatically if FL teaching focuses on communicative skills. It means if FL teaching takes the form of communication practice and gives priority to communication skills, the learner will directly acquire linguistic and communicative competence.

This argument is illustrated in the following table (Allwright 1976:168):

Table 1. *Part/Whole Relationship between Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence*



Recent Approaches to Communicative Foreign Language Teaching

Achieving communicative competence, knowledge must comprise static and dynamic knowledge (language system and its use). Learners need both. Thus, there should be an approach meets both needs.

To do this, alternative approaches rooted in L2 learning theory have been presented. Littlewood (1982) has suggested that the learner’s work with the FL progress from part skills to whole skills.

Brumfit (1984) has introduced the distinction between “accuracy” and “fluency”. Ellis (1985, 1988, and 1990) has worked with the notions of “controlled practice” and “free practice”, and with the notions of “form-focused instruction” and “meaning-focused instruction”

Littlewood and Brumfit solve the problems pointed out above concerning, on the one hand, the neglect if the methodological component (Wilkins) and, on the other, the neglect of syllabus design (Allwright) by introducing a communicative methodology which includes two basic activity types, one which is concerned with linguistic forms, another which takes care of content and the communicative usage of the code.

The communicative methodology developed by Brumfit takes its starting point in a distinction between *accuracy* and *fluency* – a methodological distinction, which is to some extent inspired by teaching experience. According to Brumfit (1984:53-57), accuracy, which embraces both formal correctness and appropriacy, refers to the learner’s concern with usage, to the language code as such, whereas fluency is natural language use or “the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the student” in situations where the learner’s focus is on the effective communication of meanings (Brumfit 1984:57).

Accuracy tends to be closely related to the syllabus, it tends to be form-based and teacher-dominated. In contrast, fluency must be student-dominated, and meaning-based, for which reason its relationship to the syllabus is unpredictable (Brumfit 1984:1-30). Thus Brumfit’s distinction between accuracy and fluency refers to a difference in the learner’s focus, to his/her orientation towards accuracy and form, or fluency and meaning (1984:53-

57,69).Learners focus on accuracy or fluency results from the pedagogical context created by the teacher, i.e. from the demands imposed on the learner by the teacher.

On the basis of this distinction between accuracy and fluency, Brumfit (1984:53:57, 131, 78-81) proposes a communicative methodology comprising two complementary elements – activities which promote accuracy and activities which are aimed at fluency.

A methodological framework very similar to that proposed by Brumfit has been developed by Littlewood (1982:152-55) he also proposed a twofold teaching methodology including two basic activity types: pre-communicative activities, which are teacher-controlled and focus on the code and its use, and correspond to Brumfit’s accuracy activities, and communicative activities, a parallel to Brumfit’s fluency activities, in which the learner is given freedom to use the FL creatively. Littlewood refers to these two activity types as *part-skills* and *whole-skills*, respectively.

The teaching methodology proposed by Ellis (1990) is in line with Brumfit’s theory. The teaching oriented distinction advocated by Ellis between “form-focused instruction” and “meaning-focused instruction” corresponds largely to the two activity types proposed by Brumfit .Form-focused instruction being responsible for the creation of accuracy-work, and meaning-focused instruction encouraging fluency-work. To repeat the implications of the differentiation, form-focused instruction encourages the learner to reflect on the formal features of the language while meaning-focused instruction encourages semantic processing, with the implication that the two types of instruction involve different potentials for language acquisition.

The Role of Practice in Classroom FL Teaching

A general assumption among methodologists is that the teaching of linguistic knowledge involves two stages: presentation and practice (cf. Rivers-Temperley’s (1978) distinction between “skill/knowledge getting” and “skill/knowledge using”).

In the presentation stage, the teacher acts as an informant instructing the learner in such a way that the meaning of the new language is as clear and memorable as possible (Byrne 1986:2). It is the teacher who provides the input, while the learner listens and understands (Ellis 1988:21).

In the practice stage, the teacher role is that of conductor. He/she does a minimum of taking and allows each performer a chance to participate. The assumption is that the learner now knows the forms that are the target of the instruction but needs to get control over them. The purpose of practice is to activate the new knowledge to the point where it can be used automatically and correctly in normal communication (Ellis 1988:21).

So far practice has been distinguished from presentation. However, it still remains to be clarified what actually takes place in the practice stage. For a learner to achieve control over his/her knowledge, different kinds of practice

may be required (Ellis 1988:21). A distinction has been made between *controlled* and *free practice*.

A further theoretical problem is that of distinguishing between “free practice” and “communicative use”. According to Ellis (1988:21), the distinction is only one of focus. When the learner is concerned with learning the L2, he/she engages in “communicative use”.

For this reason, Ellis suggests that what the distinction between controlled and free practice amounts to is really a distinction between focused and unfocused performance.

An Integrated Approach to Communicative FL Teaching

Whereas the “early approaches” focused on syllabus design, and either completely disregarded methodological considerations (Widdowson and Johnson) or advocated a “minimal teaching strategy” (Allwright), recent approaches (Brumfit, Littlewood, and Ellis), regardless of terminology, acknowledge the need in foreign language pedagogy for both declarative and procedural knowledge. An aspect which seems to have been left unresolved is how the two components can be related in the teaching approach and hence in the learner’s work to improve his/her L2 knowledge and skills.

Thus, although Brumfit’s theory comprises both a knowledge component and a skills component, his teaching methodology does not create a link between syllabus design and communicative activity, and he makes no attempt to integrate the two; on the contrary, the learner is left to his/her own devices to find out how the formal lesson may further his/her communicative activities. In fact, Brumfit underestimates the importance of syllabus design, which he regards only as a checklist for teachers and learners, and his methodology does not create between syllabus design and communicative activity.

1. Great importance is attached to syllabus design. Unlike the position taken by Brumfit, syllabus design (and hence form-focused instruction) is not conceived of as serving only as a checklist, but the teaching content functions as an “acquisition facilitator” to help the learner acquire more of the TL, which is in agreement with the integrated model of instructed L2 acquisition (4.6.6).

As recent research has shown that form-focused instruction can be justified not only on pedagogical grounds, the values of these activities are grounded on psycholinguistic explanation. It helps the learner notice the gap between his/her own interlanguage rules and native speaker competence; it sensitizes the learner to appropriate behavior patterns, and encourages him/her to pay attention to specific features to be acquired. Consequently it facilitates error correction and may be a useful means of overcoming obliterate subsumption.

2. The psycholinguistic motivation for communicative activity is not that of converting learning into acquisition, as no such “conversion” is believed to take place. Instead, the aim is the acquisition of procedural knowledge in acquisition rich contexts.
3. Meaningful instruction is based on the notion of “comprehensible input” which in turn enables us to address the question of how intervention should take place. Only structures and nations which can be readily understood by the learner will lead to “intake”.
4. “Form-focused instruction” and “meaning-focused instruction” are not seen as two unrelated activities. Not only the former, but also the latter must ideally be related to the syllabus. The very aim of the integrated approach to FL teaching is the attempt to reconcile the teaching of formal aspects and communicative activity so that the learner acquires communicative competence.
5. The importance of enlarging the teaching content to include pragmatic aspects is emphasized. In Ellis’s (1990) mention of form-focused instruction, only grammatical aspects are considered. However, communicative competence includes both formally correct and socially appropriate pragmalinguistic strategies as well as the ability to put these strategies to appropriate sociopragmatic use. As shown, also pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic rules can be made explicit and hence be made the goal of the learner’s conscious attention.
6. The use of role simulations goes far beyond “role relations and situation where these are highly predictable”. The intention is to enable the learners to cope in situations involving unforeseen demands, for example in terms of conflicts, to develop negotiation skills and stretch their communicative potential when being “pushed” to perform in real operating conditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the important thing in my paper while studying these approaches we have found it more appropriate to incorporate these approaches into a common approach applicable to our needs and we found that our response of our students and the interaction of the learners is quiet encouraging for us to continue long there lines of teaching. Since our objection is achieving the kind of linguistic competence in our student population which is practically in line with needs and requirements of our developing society. Especially in such linguistic activities as written and verbal translation which has become dominating aspect of cultural socio and economic development in our modern globalized world.

I as a teacher of language and as a student of this field feel that our job is not finished. It is indeed important that we develop our research into case-studies that demonstrate in real life terms the efficiency of our approach. It is

my view that we may need to work together with institutions and organizations, other than rarely academic establishments to see how the product that we send them, i.e :our graduates correspond to the requirements and the job descriptions that they would like to see filled. Thus, I hope as do my colleagues at Applied Science University; will be part of our planned research project for next time.

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