

**The Language Teacher at Work in the Learner-Centered Classroom:  
Communicate, Decision Make, And Remember to Apply the  
(Educational) Linguistics**

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**ABSTRACT:** Um novo contexto emergente na área de línguas, decorrente de inúmeros fenômenos - plano e implementação de um currículo centrado no aluno, ênfase em objetivos comunicativos e sociais e em processos de aprendizagem, e papel do professor como ser bem informado, crítico e independente para tomar decisões - está redefinindo a responsabilidade tradicional do professor de ensinar regras gramaticais e socioculturais. Em vista disso, este artigo tem como objetivo resumir e discutir os meios pelos quais professores de segunda língua podem consultar e usar resultados de pesquisa da lingüística educacional. Entretanto, convém lembrar que a base da pesquisa oferecida pela lingüística educacional não é prescritiva, mas se torna fonte de informação que professores podem usar de acordo com suas escolhas em termos de estratégias e materiais na sala de aula. A interação pesquisador-professor, longe de ser assimétrica, é circular. Pesquisadores atuais foram antes (ou ainda são) professores e os professores, por sua vez, poderão sempre levantar questionamentos quando resultados de pesquisa não se aplicarem ao ensino e aprendizagem que acontecem na sala de aula.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss ways in which classroom teachers of a second language (L2) can apply findings from educational linguistics research to their work with language learners as their traditional responsibilities of teaching grammatical and sociocultural rules are being reshaped within the context of a number of current phenomena in the field of language education -- the design and implementation of a learner-centered curriculum, an emphasis on the communicative, social goals and processes of language learning, and the growth and recognition of the classroom teacher as an independent and reflective decision maker.

Of course the reshaping of language education is not in itself a new phenomenon, as language education has been the subject of much discussion and debate over the years, indeed over centuries, as overviews on the history of the field well attest. (See, for example, the various perspectives Howatt 1984, Kelly 1969, Pennycook 1989, and Richards and Rodgers 1986). Just as any complex field, it is informed by many disciplines, influenced by a host of socioeconomic, historical, and political factors, and subject to any number of bandwagons that have been formed and re-formed over the methodologies it employs. (See Clarke 1982). Yet, even when we attempt to ignore the enormity in the scope of language education and to reduce its ingredients to the simpler terms of a language to be learned by learners who must learn it, it is difficult to avoid questions as to the contributions of classroom teachers to this enterprise, as it is they who are expected to take on much of the responsibility for making sure that learning takes place.

What does it take to be a classroom L2 teacher? What sorts of work are required? What kinds of training are needed? What should the L2 teacher know about language? About language learners? About the range of teaching materials and strategies available to them? Such questions are all too familiar, with answers as abundant in their number as they are disparate in content. (See, for example, the proliferation of recent publications of relevance, including volumes by Alatis, Stern, and Strevens 1983, Fanselow 1990, Freeman 1989, Richards and Nunan 1990, Richards and Crookes 1988, and chapters in Alatis 1991). Yet, what makes this period in language education somewhat different and cautiously optimistic is that there is now a rich and as yet expanding body of research whose insights into language learning and language use can respond to these questions.

This research has come in large part from the field of educational linguistics. This is a field whose research questions, theoretical structures, and contributions of service are focused on issues and concerns in education. The more obvious issues and concerns are those which in themselves pertain to language, e.g., the relationship between types of teacher questions and the syntactic complexity of learner responses in the L2 classroom. The field of educational linguistics can also include educational issues and concerns in which language plays a less direct role, but nevertheless can be addressed through language analysis. In addressing issues and concerns about student tracking, for example, the relationship between teacher questions and learner responses could also be analyzed, here to provide insight into strengths and weaknesses of the academic environments provided under different tracks.

With respect to language education, educational linguistics research has shed light on issues and concerns regarding the processes, participants, and environments of language learning

and teaching and the linguistic and social goals toward which they strive. These findings have found particular focus in two current domains of interest in language education. One of these domains is the design and implementation of curricula for the communicative needs of language learners and the social processes which assist their learning; the other is the professionalization of the classroom teacher as an educator capable of conceptualizing, shaping, and accomplishing these curricular aims.

These two domains of interest hold much prominence throughout the broader field of education as well language education has benefited greatly from work on learner-centered instruction in the mainstream, as it has incorporated research on the L1 composing process into the teaching of L2 writing and the study of L2 writing processes (Raimes 1985, 1991 and Zamel 1976, 1983) and has been guided by principles of whole language curricula in its design of content based L2 and bilingual programs. (See Edelskey 1991 and Rigg 1991). And fairly obvious affiliations can be seen between learner-centered practices such as group work in the language classroom and cooperative learning in broader educational contexts (Compare Pica and Doughty 1985 and with Kagan 1986 and Slavin 1983, and between content-based language teaching and the integration of language arts across the broader curriculum of school subjects. (See, for example Snow, Met, and Genessee 1989 and Mohan 1986). Finally, there is a mutuality of interest among language educators and other professional educators in defining an appropriate base of knowledge for the work that they do. A mutuality of goals and outcomes can be seen, for example, in Freeman and Richards 1994, who focus on language education, and Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1992 and Shulman 1987 who address broader educational themes.

Despite these ties and relationships with the broader field of education, however, the experience of language learners and teachers, taken together with research on language learning and teaching, has continued to remind us that language education carries its own special challenges and needs. As both a body of knowledge to be learned and evaluated and an instrument for communicating and evaluating that knowledge, language, after all, holds considerable distinction with respect to other subject areas of educational pursuit.

Further, languages are so rigorously complex that many of their linguistic and social rules can be difficult to discover, to understand, and to articulate, even for native speakers. Learners progress in much of their L2 study if and when they are ready to do so. In this process, they must integrate the rules and features of the language they are learning with those of the (one or many) languages already known to them, including those of their own developing interlanguage. Thus, there is not a one-to-one relationship between what learners produce as output and what they are given as input.

These, and countless other considerations must surely be taken into account in any program of language education. And, indeed, they form the basis for the kinds of decisions that educators must make as they attempt to design and implement a successful curriculum that is both learner-centered and communicative in its aims and activities.

How then, can L2 teachers turn to, and be assisted by, educational linguistics research in their decision-making responsibilities as they attempt to guide students within a learner-centered, communicative curriculum? How can educational linguistics research assist their immediate and longer range concerns? How can it contribute to their current store of professional knowledge? How can it lead them toward a distinctive, professional status, shared with colleagues across the educational community? To address these questions, we will review a number of characteristics of such curricula that both provoke reflection and often require decision-making on teachers' parts.

#### The Learner-Centered, Communicative Curriculum:

##### Contributions and Perspectives from Educational Linguistics Research

The movement toward a learner-centered, communicative curriculum has been widespread across the field of language education. Much of the impetus has come from the changing face of learners' needs, more specifically from their need to learn language quickly and efficiently for communicative purposes. Among adults, for example, the ability to communicate through the medium of another language has become a social and professional tool, not just mark of educated individuals, but a basic skill they cannot afford to be without in the interdependent economic and social conditions of the contemporary world. For younger learners, too, language learning through and for communication has come to be viewed in many countries as preparation for the adult world as well as for their own immediate academic environment.

Theoretical and empirical work from the field of educational linguistics has already contributed enormously to this effort. Educational linguists have drawn on methodologies in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis to identify and record the language that is used in the professional, vocational, and academic contexts of life toward which learners aim (See, for example, the range of work represented in this area from Breen (1987), and Wilkins (1976) to Cohen and Olshtain (1978, 1993) and Wolfson (1981, 1983, 1984). Educational linguists have also built on and expanded theories of language competence, specifically notions of communicative competence expressed in Hymes (1972) and Savignon (1972), to provide a detailed picture of the social and

strategic goals of language learners and the expectations placed upon them. (See Canale and Swain 1980).

Throughout the learner-centered, communicative curriculum, communication is regarded as not only the purpose and outcome of learners' language study, but also the process through which such a purpose and outcome are accomplished. It is believed that by using a language to communicate meaningful information, learners can internalize the language as a system of structural and sociolinguistic rules and features. The prevailing view is that students will acquire an L2 by focusing attention not on its forms, but on the meaningful content that such forms encode. Teachers are expected to structure their classroom environment along these lines. There is an extensive, ever-thriving literature on this topic, but see, among others, some fundamental works by Brumfit and Johnson 1979, Krashen and Terrell 1983, Savignon 1972, and Widdowson 1978.

Along with these conceptual underpinnings have come a number of distinctive classroom practices. Thus, in many communicative classrooms, L2 rules and features are not explicitly emphasized through direct instruction, but rather, are drawn from subject matter content in literature, the social sciences, and/or the learner's own domain of social or professional interest. Activities are often centered on academic occupational, or high-interest materials, and are based on decisions that need to be made, problems to be solved, and opinions to be shared. Cooperative and collaborative organizational frameworks are used to emphasize learner spontaneity and initiative over teacher-directed drill and practice. These are often designed to replicate the settings and situations to which the learners aspire.

When described in the ways above, activities in the communicative classroom have obvious, distinctive, and defining aspects which contrast sharply with classroom practices that focus on isolated rules and features of language divorced from their situated use. Beyond these few distinguishing features, however, the learner-centered, communicative curriculum has taken on a host of realizations that are wide ranging and varied. From the theoretical side, for example, modes for identification and organization of communicative curriculum units are numerous and are often as competing as they are complementary (See descriptions and discussions in Breen 1984 and Long and Crookes 1992).

And with respect to implementation, communicative curricula, when put into classroom practice, have often been shown to be less communicative at all. As revealed, for example, in work of Long and Sato 1983, Pica and Doughty 1985a, b, and Pica and Long 1986, even classrooms that claim to be communicative often focus on L2 structure, with little attention to meaning. Interaction might take the form of teacher transmission of communication rules and evaluation of students on them. Such classrooms, as Prabhu (1987),

has pointed out, would emphasize communication as the only goal of L2 learning. This might keep the students from engaging in any meaningful exchange with the teacher and each other and thereby deprive them of opportunities for communication as the process through which L2 learning occurs. (Again, see Prabhu 1987).

Thus, the learner-centered, communicative curriculum, conceived as most suited to the needs of language learners in today's world, has numerous actual and potential incarnations when put into a classroom context. Some curricula may meet those needs; others may overlook them or possibly work against them. A singular, "correct" curriculum is inadvisable, as it would be unable to address the great diversity of learners and their needs. Yet teachers who want to work with L2 learners within a communicative framework expect to do so in a way that is credible, respectable, and sound. They want to make sensible choices from the many options that confront them, and to work with "a sense of plausibility," informed by a multiplicity of sources, to cite Prabhu again (1993: 172).

And this is where L2 teachers can turn to educational linguistics research as one of these sources. They might see direct application of some of its findings to their own teaching circumstances. Or they might raise questions about the applicability of other findings to their work. This could lead them to design and carry out their own research. Even here, prior studies in the field could be of service, their theoretical frames provocative, and their methodologies useful. Whatever direction teachers might pursue, they can draw on many facets of educational linguistics research to guide their decisions as they implement a learner-centered, communicative curriculum in their classrooms. And by incorporating educational linguistics research into their knowledge base for program implementation and classroom decision making, they can exercise their professional role as teachers of language, an area which is distinct from other content areas. They can also expand their role as researchers and research consumers, able to address the relevance and generalizability of research findings to their specific classroom contexts, to inform current theories on language learning and use, and to contribute to, as well as implement, a research agenda in these areas.

But teachers cannot, and should not, do this on their own. The most fruitful work in this regard will be as systemic and collaborative as possible, involving all those who share co-membership in the educational community. Those primary work is in different aspects of language education -- whether that be classroom teaching, research, publication, or policy must listen to each other's questions and concerns, as they make decisions that can truly make a difference in the lives of language learners. Such collaboration is not what these different participants may be used to doing. Not only is it unusual, it is not easy either. But it is important to the success of the

learner-centered, communicative curriculum and the challenges it poses.

A good basis for launching this effort is discussion and dialogue around the body of information on L2 teaching and learning that has already come from educational linguistics research. The careful control under which much of this work was undertaken means that its findings are not directly applicable to the classroom. However, many of the questions that inspired the work are clearly classroom oriented and a good number are classroom based. It is in light of the relevance of educational linguistics research that the following aspects of teacher decision making are discussed. They have to do with the planning choices and on-the-spot decisions teachers must make to select and organize course content and activities around communication and learning, to structure classroom communication to assist the learning process and to provide other kinds of learning experiences when classroom communication is insufficient in this regard. Here, they are posed as questions, followed by responses from research. These responses are not intended as answers, but rather, the basis for further discussion and collaboration between and among professionals in language education.

How should a learner-centered, communicative curriculum be organized with respect to classroom content and activities?

### **Tasks and L2 Learning Processes**

The multiplicity of choices in content, most of which are very attractive choices, in widespread use all over the world, offers considerable challenge to the teacher who wants to design and/or implement a learner-centered, communicative curriculum. There are structures and lexes, notions and functions, topics and situations, and multiple combinations of same. Each has its strengths and weaknesses as a single or integrated unit of communication content, and a number of excellent reviews have been published on them. (See, for example, Breen 1987, Long and Crookes 1992 and Nunam 1988, 1989). Among these authors (and others), communication "tasks" have emerged as a suitable choice for the basis of a learner-centered, communicative curriculum. Although defined in various ways, the key features of "task" are "work" or "activity," and "goal." (See Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun 1993). In carrying out a task, learners and interlocutors must work together, using language to achieve a goal or outcome. For example, they might have to share instructions in order to replicate a picture or assemble an object, to exchange ideas to reach a decision or solve a problem, or to pool clues to solve a mystery or complete a puzzle.

Tasks have come under the scrutiny of research more than notions and functions or any of the other units of curriculum content noted above, the basis of these latter being largely theoretical. Yet tasks have held up exceedingly well under such scrutiny, and have demonstrated a capacity to provide conditions which can nurture the kinds of communication considered essential to L2 learning. Thus, there is a growing amount of evidence to support learners' participation in communicative tasks with respect to both L2 learning outcomes and the processes that underlie them. With respect to outcomes, both grammatical rules and communication skills appear to be assisted, this revealed most clearly, for example, in an evaluation of the task based program of Prabhu. (See Beretta and Davies 1986).

Research has also revealed that learners' participation in tasks enhances their experience in L2 learning at the process level as well. This is accomplished as learners negotiate with their interlocutors over the comprehensibility of the messages they provide and those they receive in order to carry out the task and bring it to a successful outcome. Their work sets up several distinct, but inter-related, conditions considered critical to successful L2 learning.

Among the conditions provided as learners negotiate for message meaning is the opportunity to be given L2 input that is modified so that they can comprehend it. Such modification often involves repetitions and rephrasings of the original L2 input, which helps to draw learners' attention to relationships of form and meaning within the L2. Their participation in negotiation also offers learners feedback on the comprehensibility of their own production. Such feedback can then be used to modify their production in ways that are important to the restructuring work they might need to do to advance their interlanguage development and eventually internalize a more target-like system of L2 rules. Such relationships are illustrated in the labeled examples below:

| NS   | Learner  |
|--|--|
| there's a chimney on the left ( <i>NS original input</i> ) a chimney is on the left ( <i>NS modified input</i> )   | what? (Learner feedback to NS)                           |
|  | the windows are crozed ( <i>Learner original input</i> ) |
| the windows have what? crossed?<br>I'm not sure what you're saying<br>there ( <i>NS feedback to learner</i> ) oh<br>the windows are closed ok sorry<br>( <i>NS feedback to Learner</i> ) | windows are closed ( <i>Learner modified output</i> )    |

Data are from Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci, and Newman 1991.



Among the relevant studies on tasks, nearly all have touched on this broad range of conditions for L2 learning, but each might be singled out for its particular emphasis on one or two. For example, Long (1980, 1981, 1985) focused primarily on input modification; Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987), on input comprehension; and Crookes and Rulon (1985, 1988), Gass and Varonis (1985), Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler (1989), Pica et al (1991), on feedback and production of modified input.

The tasks used in these studies were reviewed, together with others in Pica, Kanagy, and Faladun (1993), and included in a task typology in which types of tasks were classified and compared according to their potential contributions to L2 learning. Among the most potentially effective types of tasks identified, two features were apparent. First, such tasks required, rather than simply invited, the exchange of information among task participants. Further, they were targeted toward only one possible solution rather than several acceptable outcomes. Specific examples included tasks which required participants to pool unique pieces of information known only to them in order to complete a picture (as in Pica et al 1991, Pica et al 1989), assemble an object or display (as in Doughty and Pica 1986, Pica and Doughty 1985a, b, and Pica, Young, and Doughty 1987), unravel a mystery story (Gass and Varonis 1985), or solve mathematics problem (Long 1980, Crookes and Rulon 1985, 1988).

#### **Communication Tasks and L2 Grammar Learning.**

Tasks are holistic in their orientation toward L2 structural forms and rules. As such, their emphasis has not been on the targeting of specific linguistic features, but rather communication of message meaning. Recently, however, such targeting has become of great interest to researchers in the design of tasks. (See, for example, Bley-Vroman and Loschky 1993 and Fotos and Ellis 1991). Often referred to as grammar-based or grammar-focused, these tasks require attainment of goals conditioned by communication and exchange of information, as well as receptive and/or productive access to a particular linguistic feature to be used in reaching these goals. For example, a task of this kind might require the learner to assemble an item such as a car, based on interviewing an interlocutor who could provide information in that regard. The information might focus on individual and multiple parts of the car, thus setting up the need for the learner to hear and produce plural -s contrasts.

Similarly, a task might be organized around a particular L2 function or notion. For example, the function of request might be highlighted in a restaurant. The notion of space might be the focus of a task that engaged them in reading and relating measurements

needed for object assembly. Although there are, no doubt, numerous other possibilities for this type of task, this is an aspect of task design which has posed considerable challenge to us. We have found it difficult to coordinate the goal-oriented criteria for task design, the need to focus on grammar, and the desire to provide learners with a context for L2 learning.

Thus, we have identified difficulties with tasks of this kind, as our work has required us to choose tasks for purposes of data collection (Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, and Linnell in progress), and in so doing, to analyze grammar-based or grammar-focused communication tasks and task structures, both those already available as well as our own designs. One common problem is found with activities often labeled as tasks that engage learners in deciding which structure to choose in order to complete a sentence or describe a picture. Research has shown that these tasks can be effective for engaging learners in discussions about grammar and in metalinguistic questioning and exchange, some of which even include negotiation for message meaning. (See Fotos and Ellis 1991). However, they differ considerably from the tasks described above, which engage learners in work whose goal is not the identification or expression of language in itself, but rather the replication of a picture, the assembly of an object, the ordering of a meal, etc.

There is a danger that if these two kinds of activities are both to be considered as grammar-based tasks, other, far less communicative assignments such as fill-in-the-blank worksheets might be labeled grammar-based "tasks" as well, if only because they, too, are work-driven, goal oriented and form-focused. This is unfortunate because grammar-based activities that are not tasks leave little possibility for the meaningful exchange characteristic of message communication, and with that, negotiation of message meaning.

Another problem we have found with grammar-based communication tasks is that they live up to the second rather than the first of their descriptive pre-modifiers. In other words, their emphasis is on "communication," not grammar, and within that communication, far more attention is given to the exchange of information than to the negotiation of meaning. In Pica et al in progress, we have been working to develop communicative tasks that engage learners in negotiation over verb form-meaning relationships. The task we are currently using requires learners and their interlocutors to replicate the picture sequence of a picture story hidden from their view and to compose a jointly-written narrative by pooling and exchanging information on the story pictures, subsets of which they hold uniquely.

What we have found is that throughout their communication about the story sequence, learners and their interlocutors (NSs as well as other learners) provide many contexts

for grammatical features, in this case, the different tense and aspectual functions that coordinate the story. They also negotiate for message meaning with considerable frequency. What they do not do, however, is bring these two components together for us! Thus they seldom negotiate over the activities of the story characters in ways that focus on verb grammar. Although our task participants occasionally negotiate over the activities of the story characters in their pictures, e.g., whether one of them “telephones” or “is telephoning” the other, such exchanges are by no means common to their communication. What we have typically found across these and other tasks is that learners and NSs prefer to describe what their pictures look like rather than exchange information about what they are doing. This activity gets them into a great deal of negotiation, but their negotiation tends to be about colors, sizes, and names rather than verb tense and aspect.

We are still working on developing grammar-focused communication tasks in order to examine their actual impact on the learner, i.e., to test whether they are as worthwhile in practice as they seem to be at a theoretical level. At another theoretical level, however, we feel that this may not be worth the effort, in light of what we have come to see as important conditions for L2 learning and the differential contributions of the different task types in bringing them about. If successful L2 learning depends on learners’ access to comprehensible and modified input, that helps to draw their attention to relationships of L2 form and meaning, and offers them feedback to modify their production and advance their interlanguage, then tasks designed to highlight specific grammatical features need not be viewed as the basis for curricular organization. They are perhaps better viewed, not as fundamental organizing units of a learner-centered, communicative curriculum, but as interventions within such a curriculum, employed to help learners when they are struggling to attain productive knowledge and use of specific grammatical features. As such, they play an important role which will be addressed below in a discussion of ways to encourage learners’ L2 awareness and sensitivity.

Before coming to that discussion, however, a further aspect of task implementation must be addressed, this having to do with the social organization in the classroom that can foster the sense of collaboration and cooperation that are at the heart of successful tasks in terms of setting up conditions for L2 learning. Teachers’ choices of social organization are many, but at issue for most is whether to let students work together or with their teacher. Each has its strengths and shortcomings, as will be discussed next in the next section.

Which types of classroom organization are effective in providing a social and linguistic environment for L2 learning?

## The Cautions in L2 Learner Peer Interaction

One of the dominant practices in the communicative, learner-centered classroom has involved letting students work together in small group and pair work. This practice is not at all unique to the L2 classroom as it has been widely espoused throughout the educational literature under other labels, e.g. cooperative, collaborative, and peer learning. Studies inside and outside language education have reported a number of positive results (See, for example, Deen 1987 for the former and Kagan 1986 and Slavin 1983 for the latter).

Is L2 learners' interaction with peers sufficient for meeting their social and linguistic needs? The results are actually mixed. For one thing, peer interaction carries with it the potential of learners hearing much more of each other's non-target-like, interlanguage input than the NS varieties toward which they strive. Thus, studies of Canadian French immersion classrooms in Canada as well as Spanish and Chinese bilingual programs in the United States have found that students who engaged in extensive interaction with their L2 speaking classroom peers, with little opportunity to interact with standard L2 speakers in the wider environment outside the classroom, received, in effect, a large proportion of interlanguage input, which, in turn limited their access to target-like L2 input. Such input appeared to reinforce their own production errors. (See Lightbown & Spada 1990, White 1990, Wong Fillmore 1992). Opportunities for interaction with a teacher would seem critical, therefore, as was the finding of Chesterfield, Chesterfield, Hayes-Latimer, and Chavez (1983), who found that in bilingual classrooms in which most students were English speaking, greater proficiency in English L2 was related to peer interaction. However, where the majority of students shared the same L1 (which, in this case was Spanish), interaction with the teacher was key to students proficiency in English L2.

These findings seem particularly appropriate to classrooms where students are homogeneous in the L1, or share a common language other than the one they are studying. It is commonly reported in classroom observation that, unless their teacher carefully monitors their language choice, students working together often communicate in their common language rather than attempt to produce the L2. However, a recent study by Futaba (1994) provides needed detail on this widely reported phenomenon. What Futaba found was that working together in dyads on communication tasks, Japanese L1 learners of English L2 seldom used their L1 to negotiate the key requirements of the task. Lapses into L1 were usually done subvocally, as learners work individually to organize information before presenting it to their partners in English L2.

## The Benefits of L2 Learner Peer Interaction

Despite the concerns raised by research learner interaction might have a negative impact on L2 production accuracy as well as invite inappropriate L1 use, another set of studies has shown that it can also assist learners' production, albeit in a fairly restricted way. In "story task" research related above (See again, Pica et al in progress), in which learners and their interlocutors share information from pictures to compose a story, we have found distinct and potentially beneficial interactions among our learners. The most salient is an exchange in which one learner supplies an appropriate lexical item to finish the other's utterance when the other is struggling to retrieve it. We call such interactions "completions," because in such instances, one learner will pause during an utterance, providing a context for the other to offer the needed word. Such words could very well function as the "satellite units" identified by Bygate (1988) to contribute toward the building of interlanguage grammar. A typical exchange of completion is shown below.

|                 |        |
|-----------------|--------|
| NNS             | NNS    |
| She made like a | fire ? |
| yes fire        | ok     |

We have also found that here, and elsewhere, is that learners' incorporation of other learners' errors into their own production has been *very rare*. Other researchers, too, have found similar phenomena (See Porter 1986), and ample evidence of learners' self-generated adjustments toward more correct production (Bruton & Samuda, 1980) and their incorporation of each others' correct productions into their own (Gass & Varonis, 1989)

Although the completions phenomenon brings a potentially beneficial contribution to peer interaction, another pattern identified when learners work together is not as reassuring, this having to do with the brevity of learner responses to each other during negotiation work. While their input to each other as they negotiate is often quite accurate with respect to L2 grammar, their utterances are commonly in the form of isolated words and short phrases. This limits learner access to L2 sentence grammar during the very time -- negotiation in which their attention is claimed to be most focused. We have also found that there is little negotiation over inflectional morphology, which in the case of our story task, would include verb endings and expressions of tense and aspect. This, as noted above, is an unfortunate, all too common, finding about negotiation during communication tasks that applies to learners and NS interlocutors alike. It raises questions as to when a learner-centered,

communicative curriculum might require a more deliberate focus on L2 form and grammar. It is to these questions that we next turn.

How can a learner-centered, communicative curriculum be adjusted and enhanced when exchange of message meaning is not sufficient for L2 mastery?

Many concerns have been raised that L2 learners in communicative programs seldom reach native speaker norms. (See, for example, Higgs and Clifford 1982 and Swain 1985). Even highly proficient learners tend to show considerable unevenness in their L2 development. In English L2, for example, learners often acquire a high degree of accuracy in constituent order syntax, which is considered a "resilient" feature, while they manifest incomplete and variable accuracy in the "fragile" features of English such as its inflectional morphology. (Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman 1989). This is not unlike the pattern reported for German L2 (See Meisel, Clahsen, and Pienemann 1981). Among the more vulnerable features are those that are difficult to perceive in communicative input, are not salient when attention is focused on the comprehension and expression of L2 message meaning, and/or bear a resemblance that is close, but not identical to their counterparts in the learners' L1. (See Lightbown and Spada 1993, Sharwood Smith 1991, White 1987, 1991, and White, Spada, Lightbown, and Ranta 1992 among others, for further exposition of this argument).

In keeping within a learner-centered perspective, incomplete L2 outcomes may be sufficient with respect to the individual needs and goals of many learners. However, this is not the case for children who need to attain complete bilingualism or adults who aspire toward academic and professional goals that require standard language use. For such learners, it has been argued that communicative activities may not be sufficient, especially if the context for L2 learning is primarily a classroom situation. (See, for example, Swain 1985). What appears to be needed are ways to enhance the communicative curriculum through activities that help learners access, internalize, and control L2 features, both structural and sociolinguistic, when they cannot do so solely on the basis of their exchange of message meaning.

How to do this appears to range from task enhancement, e.g., by engaging learners in tasks that call their attention to those structures and forms they do not appear to induce through communication alone (See Doughty 1992, Bley-Vroman and Loschky 1993, Mackey in press, and Mackey, Pienemann, and Thronton 1991) to explicit grammar instruction and feature correction (See again Lightbown and Spada 1993, White 1987, and White et al 1992, as well as Day and Shapson 1991, on the French conditional, Harley 1989, and Spada and Lightbown 1993 for work on questions) to calling learners' attention to differences between target L2 structures and those they produce on their own. (See again Lightbown and

Spada 1990 for English have and be, Tomasello and Heron 1988, 1989 for a variety of French structures prone to learner misgeneralization). Such activities get learners to engage in one or both of two processes more popularly known as "focus on form" (Long 1991) and "notice the gap". (Schmidt and Frota 1986). They have their roots in earlier constructs of "consciousness raising" (Rutherford and Sharwood Smith 1985 and Sharwood Smith 1991) and language awareness (Hawkins 1984), and more recently language sensitivity (James and Garrett 1991).

#### "Focus on Form" in the Learner-Centered, Communicative Classroom

With its findings with regard to "focus on form," research is not suggesting an all-encompassing return to grammar instruction, but rather a sensitivity to language. Meaningful tasks that focus learner's attention to form might be an ideal toward which the L2 can aspire, and have already been implemented successfully in experimental settings (See Doughty 1991 and Loschky 1989). However, as noted above, it cannot be taken for granted that communicative tasks that involve decision making, discussion, following directions, etc. can require messages where linguistic features such as verb endings, adverb placement, phoneme clusters and phoneme voicing, for example, are so crucial to communication that learners will focus attention on these features specifically or will anticipate their inclusion in the input they receive. All too often, the language needed to encode a message is sufficiently redundant that an omitted or imprecise feature will not make a difference in successful conveyance of the message. Or the context of the message may be sufficiently shared and understood by speaker and interlocutors that, again, there is little need to attend to form to express or understand the intention underlying the message.

Another area in which "focus on form" may be needed is with respect to L2 sociolinguistic rules. As Wolfson (1981, 1983, 1984) and others have pointed out, many of these are almost impossible to discern in communication, and in a classroom context, a large number of these rules are not required at all. Learners are therefore kept from accessing them. And as Auerbach and Burgess (1986) have demonstrated, in an effort to put a communicative curriculum into practice, materials are often introduced which look authentic with respect to the sociolinguistic categories they present to learners, but the linguistic devices presented for encoding these categories are more often than not based on their author's intuition than on an empirical data. As result there is often a huge difference

between the social rules that learners are taught and those that are actually used by NSs and NNSs alike.

Recent research in the area of pragmatics has uncovered a good deal of information on the appropriate encoding and applications of sociolinguistic rules in the areas of requests and apologies (Blum -Kulka, House-Edmondson, and Kasper 1989, Faerch and Kasper 1987, House and Kasper 1987, compliments (Billmyer 1990, 1992, Holmes and Brown 1987, Wolfson 1981, 1983, 1984), complaints (Cohen and Olshtain 1985, 1993, Olshtain and Weinbach 1987), expressions of gratitude (Eisenstein and Bodman 1986) and disapproval (Damico-Reisner 1983), and refusals (Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz 1990). Of additional interest have been specific sociolinguistic contexts in which pragmatic skills are required. Those in which a fair amount of research has already accrued are in university settings. These include academic advising sessions (See, for example, Bardovi-Harling and Hatford 1990) and teaching assistant classroom interaction (See Bailey and Pica, Barnes, and Finger 1989, Tyler 1992, and Williams 1992).

A small, but promising number of studies (e.g. Billmyer 1990, 1992 and Holmes and Brown 1987) have shown that learners can be assisted in their access to such rules and their contexts of use through a combination of conversational events and explicit articulation thereof. This is certainly encouraging. To the general perspective that teachers must exercise caution about materials that claim to provide authentic discourse and sociolinguistic rules, is added that evidence that there are a number of such rules that might be taught with confidence, perhaps others, given more research. This instructional dimension of certain sociolinguistic rules appears to have particular import in foreign language learning contexts. In countries in which sociolinguistic competence in an L2 is becoming increasingly important, it has been shown that direct instruction in sociolinguistic skills may be an effective strategy toward meeting these ends. (See Burnaby and Sun 1989).

Helping Learners to "Notice the gap" in the Communicative Classroom.

One of the more recently held assumptions about the L2 learning that has had implications for the communicative classroom is that learners make hypotheses about the L2 they are learning and that therefore their initial L2 productions should not be expected to correspond to those in their target L2. This, in turn, suggests that correction of learner error may be inconsequential to the natural path of L2 acquisition. It is believed that errors are evidence that learners are experimenting with L2 rules and patterns as they perceive them and that they work out these rules appropriately in good time. As



been pointed out, however, with respect to both L2 theory and pedagogy, is the danger in letting this go on without the intervention of correction. Lack of correction, it is argued, may imply to the learner that what actually an incorrect production was in fact acceptable. (Bley-Vroman 1986, Higgs and Clifford 1982, Schachter, 1983, 1984, 1991, and White, 1991).

How do these theoretical claims and examples help teachers make informed decisions about correction in the classroom? This is a difficult question to answer since, so far, research on the actual practice of classroom correction has shown it to be a highly diversified classroom phenomenon, sometimes focused on function, other times, on form. Correction can be provided differentially and unsystematically to and across students, yielding confusing and, at times, contradictory results. Thus, research has shown that teachers find it difficult to provide systematic correction, correcting students more often for errors in meaning than for errors in grammar, and when providing correction, they do so inconsistently to both individual students and the class as a whole. (Fanselow, 1977).

Still, research has shown that a number of strategies seem to work quite well. For example, in Chaudron (1977), teacher's reduced repetitions of students' errors, with emphasis on the error itself, were found to be effective in learner's subsequently correct responses, much more so, for than expansions or elaborations of the learners' utterances or isolated suppliance of a correct form. In another study, L2 learners who were first led "down the garden path" to produce typical errors of overgeneralization for exceptional L2 structures, performed well on these structures if they were given feedback and instruction immediately after they made the errors. Learners who were first taught the rules and exceptions for these structures had less success in using them correctly. (Tomasello and Herron 1988, 1989). These are two ways of calling students' attention to differences between their errors and the correct versions thereof that seem critical to the success of correction as an intervention in L2 learning. Further, the timing of correction seems to be of great importance. Schmidt and Frota (1986) found that in order to benefit from correction, Schmidt had to be given a corrected version of his utterance immediately following what he had just said.

One important finding from research is that correction is especially effective when coordinated into or combined with communicative activities. Thus, Lightbown (1992) found that students whose teacher provided immediate corrective feedback on their substitution of have for be during communicative activities, were able to overcome this error and sustain correct production well beyond their period of instruction. Students who were corrected during audiolingual drill and practice activities were also able to self-correct, but could not sustain such correction beyond the classroom. (Lightbown 1992). And in Brock, Crookes, Day, & Long (1986),

correction had no significant effect on learners' production during half hour research sessions. However, when learners were corrected during communication games, they quickly incorporated these corrections into their responses. Two essential features of correction are evident from results of this research. First, correction must bring students' attention to their own errors, and secondly, it must do so in meaningful, communicative contexts.

### Educational Linguistics and the L2 Teaching Profession

The field of education is going through a burgeoning movement toward teacher professional and empowerment for making decisions about what to teach, how to do so. Much of this is taking place in ways that embrace the broader context of educational reform and school restructuring around teacher control. The classroom L2 teacher too, is faced with new and important challenges. It was not so long ago that applied linguistics meant that structuralist linguistics was first applied to the design of classroom materials, then applied to activities grounded in behaviorist psychology. Such earlier restrictions on their knowledge and skills left classroom teachers with little to decide on beyond choosing a sound or structure for classroom drill and practice. Fortunately, they are no longer dependent on this narrow view of linguistics for their identity. Educational research on language and learning has provided a substantial knowledge base that offers teachers both strategies for assisting their students and opportunities for attaining distinctive, professional status within the wider educational community.

The research base provided by educational linguistics offers no prescriptions, but rather a source of information that teachers can apply to choices they must make about classroom strategies and materials. Teachers need not become linguists to do this, but when they incorporate findings in educational linguistics that pertain to their work, I believe that this can enrich their teaching and enhance the learning of their students. At the risk of appearing to be a top down researcher, I should note that the movement here is somewhat circular, as many educational linguists were classroom teachers to begin with. In fact, it was the questions about language learning and teaching they experienced as classroom teachers that influenced their decisions, my own included, to engage in research.

Some of you reading this paper may be linguists who teach, others may have been educated as teachers, though not as language teachers, and not in linguistics. Some of you may have even been trained as language teachers, but the orientation of your training has provided little background in linguistics. All of you, I hope, find much gratification in your work. You may feel that you have been applying educational linguistics throughout your career, but have just not been calling your work by that name. Perhaps I

have given you a new label for this component of your work. In any case, I do hope you will turn to educational linguistics research and be able to apply it, to the work you do, and to the questions you may have. And that you will raise questions about educational linguistics research when it does not apply to the teaching and learning that goes on in your classroom. Such questions open up new areas for research that will benefit teachers and learners alike, and bring teachers and researchers together as professionals in ways that will enhance the field of language education.

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