

DESIGNING LANGUAGE TEACHING

On becoming
a reflective
professional

ALBERT WEIDEMAN

Designing language teaching

**— on becoming a reflective
professional**

Albert Weideman

University of the Free State

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1 Introduction

HUMANS CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT COMMITMENT. IN ALL OF THEIR workaday lives, they make commitments in order to live. The most prominent example of commitment, probably, comes in setting up durable, loving relationships, such as marriage, with others. But even when we participate in other, less durable relationships, such as keeping an appointment with someone whom we might perhaps meet only once, we make a commitment. Human action is based on it.

Teaching is no different, nor is language teaching an exception. We teach language on the assumption that the world is structured in a certain way, and we place our trust in this assumption. Our language teaching is a demonstration of the fact that we have committed ourselves to a certain set of assumptions about how things work. As in many other kinds of human action, the beliefs and commitments on which we base our language teaching need not necessarily be choices of which we are wholly conscious, all the time. The beliefs that support our language teaching may therefore be adopted quite unconsciously. As language teachers, we might never throughout a long career articulate these beliefs, or become aware of how they influence our teaching. We might never think about what lies beneath our teaching, or about which assumptions support it. But we would not be

able to teach if we did not place our trust in some assumption on how, for example, learners learn. As Karavas-Doukas (1996: 188) points out:

Teachers' educational attitudes and theories, although in many cases unconsciously held, have an effect on their classroom behaviour, influence what students actually learn, and are a potent determinant of teachers' teaching style ...

When the communicative approach to language teaching (CLT, or communicative language teaching) came into vogue in the 1980's, I was often asked by teachers at seminars: "What about errors?" They were worried that CLT had thrown out the correction of errors in learners' language, since one of the strong versions of CLT held that errors were OK. The argument is that errors indicate that the language being learned is growing and developing, and that, as a teacher, one should not spend too much effort on the overt correction of errors. The belief was that **fluency** in communicating in a target language was more likely to lead to the learning of the language than **accuracy**. Without taking sides in this debate before we have had an opportunity ourselves to look more closely at CLT, let me say what my stock reply was. In order to get the teachers who were asking about error correction to **think** about their own teaching practice, I normally replied: "Give me an example of where, in your own teaching, the correction of errors had the effect of eliminating them." Now teachers would, of course, be able to come up with all kinds of examples of where they had corrected errors. Yet I stuck to my guns, and kept asking: "With what effect?" I pointed out that in all the years I had taught language, I had spent much energy on correcting punctuation errors, concord mistakes, errors in the use of tense, grammatical construction, word choice, and so on. But, I maintained, I had failed ever to see any result.¹ The next time written work

1. See Truscott (1996) in *Language Learning* 46/2 (327-369): Review article: The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes.

was handed in, the mistakes were still the same, and the categories of mistakes remained unchanged. Of course, this is not wholly true: I did occasionally notice improvement, mostly in individual cases, not in the performance of the class as a whole. But I always had doubts as to whether these improvements were the result of my correcting the errors, or whether they were caused by something else. In any case, the point of my argument with the teachers was to make them reflect on the beliefs that supported their language teaching. In their case, it was the belief that errors had to be corrected immediately. In the case of the proponents of CLT, errors could be tolerated.

It is not difficult to see what assumptions those teachers who believed in the immediate correction of errors were making. It is an assumption on how languages are learned. Their belief stemmed from the behaviourist proposition, prevalent in the early 1950's and beyond, that language learning could be explained in terms of habit formation. The most fashionable method of language teaching at that time, the Audio-lingual method (ALM), developed language teaching drills as a technique. The idea behind using these drills was to assist in developing the new language as an almost automatic habit. In order to form such new habits, proponents of the ALM used **repetition** as their main technique, for they believed that repetition was the best way of forming habits. And since the teacher had to help the individual learner to form **good** habits (the correct form of the target language), bad habits, when they manifested themselves in the form of errors, had to be stamped out immediately. In a typical language laboratory drill, designed to assist in forming habits in the new language efficiently by using technology, there are two sets of paired stimulus and response exchanges. Here is an example:

Voice on tape (*initial stimulus*): What's this?

Expected student *response*: It's a hen.

Voice on tape (*reinforced, correct response*): It's a hen

If the student answers correctly, as in the above example, the correct response to the stimulus is reinforced by repeating the correct response. If, on the other hand, the learner had made an error, then, of course, the error would be quickly and immediately corrected in a technologically efficient way.

As we shall see in our discussion of the ALM, many teachers began to question the practices that stemmed from the belief that language is a set of habits. It is a pity, however, that more teachers did not go one step further, to question the belief behind the practices of the ALM. Instead, many who were disillusioned by audio-lingualism chose to select new materials, or opted sometimes to start varying their technique of teaching, or tried to make the boring drills interesting by placing them in a more realistic context. In a word, they became eclectic in their approach. In fact, eclecticism became so widely acceptable that today many good teachers use it proudly as a tag to describe their teaching, wearing it almost like a badge of honour. They are saying, in effect: "We have been rescued from the excesses of audio-lingualism. Rather than believe in any single way of teaching, we subscribe to moderate doses of (almost) everything." No matter that audio-lingualism is long discredited. The excessively strong, indeed ideological beliefs that audio-lingualism spawned about the nature of language learning made teachers its victims and not its beneficiaries. And, of course, it made teachers who fell victim to its beguiling, behaviourist undertone (*language is learned by repetition*) wary of being trapped again. Rather be safe than sorry!

The nature of all actions driven by ideology is that its effects more often than not come to haunt the disciples. This is also true of language

teaching. If we have an ideological belief that this or that is the nature of language learning, we soon become its victims. The commitment, the sacrifice it asks us to make, is so strong that we never question that belief.

So: are teachers doomed to be the victims of their commitment to a certain set of assumptions about language learning? The ones who say: “We are eclectic” seem to answer: of course not! What they fail to understand, is that this drifting from one good idea to the next is itself a belief. And its effect is to be seen in the work of many good language teachers, who spend a lifetime collecting interesting, attractive materials to liven up their teaching, and never spare a thought for the learners in the process. For, in an eclectic approach, there is no guarantee that learners — like their teachers — might ever make sense of how they are learning. Learners may be exposed to a wealth of interesting materials and an attractive variety of exercises, but might never learn anything through them. How do these materials make it easier for learners to develop? What is the golden thread running through the use of this or that set of exercises? Learners may therefore often remember merely the personalities of their lively language teacher, but may not recognise how their success or failure at learning the target language relates to the teaching methods employed.

In short, we may never think about what we put our trust in; we might never bother to articulate our beliefs and assumptions about language teaching. But, as teachers, we owe it to the learners who are in our care to question our own beliefs, to probe for our hidden assumptions, and to bring them to the surface. Once we can hold up our beliefs about language teaching to the light, we might be able to understand our own professional practices so much better.

To have a set of beliefs about language teaching that is in tune with one's view of the world is a magnificent achievement. But to teach in a way that is out of step with what one believes is truly a nightmare. In the late 1980's, a number of teacher trainers who worked within NGOs remarked to me about how autocratic the teachers were with whom they worked. The irony is, they were dealing with real firebrands, teachers who were, at the time, at the forefront of the political struggle for freedom. There was a complete mismatch between the democratic ideals that these teachers stood for, and the way that they handled their classes. These must have been very unhappy teachers! To teach in a way that is not consistent with what one deeply believes in, must be unpleasant not only for the ones who do the teaching, but also for the recipients of their teaching. Such conditions, where teaching practices contradict teachers' own beliefs, are not limited to our own country. Today, there are very few teachers of other languages that will openly confess to holding views that are contrary to the reigning orthodoxy, CLT. Yet there is widespread evidence that their classroom practices are at variance with their beliefs. The study done by Karavas-Doukas (1996) among Greek-speaking teachers of English in Greece showed up just how big the differences are between these teachers' practices and their beliefs.

This discussion is about getting a grip on our beliefs about language learning. It is about identifying the style of teaching that we commit ourselves to as a result of what we believe in. For aspiring teachers it is not only about identifying a style that is in tune with their beliefs, but of developing one with which they will be personally satisfied. It is also about the complacency that comes with the adoption of a specific style, and about overcoming it through the continual examination of one's own practices. It is about being able to evaluate critically the teaching practices proposed by prescribed syllabuses, with which many teachers are forced to work. Finally,

it is about overcoming prejudice against styles of teaching that, because we did not understand either their philosophy or their style, we tend to avoid. If we can gain understanding of the beliefs that guide those styles that we would normally be averse to using, we might greatly enrich our own teaching.

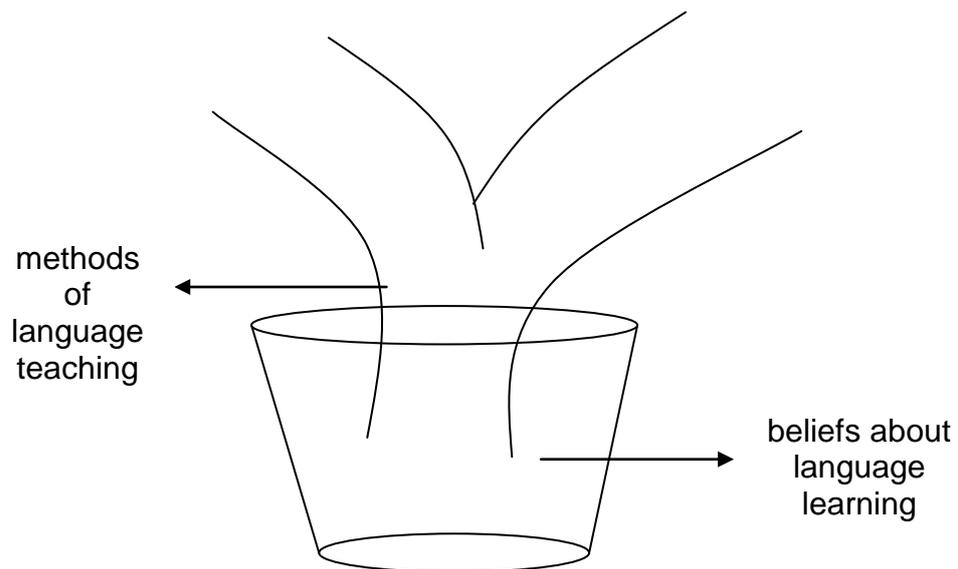
2 Traditional approaches

LANGUAGE TEACHING, OF WHICH ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IS today probably the most prominent, has been influenced by a number of traditions. If we accept that each tradition has its own distinct teaching methodology, we must also ask where this methodology derives from. The starting point of this discussion is Larsen-Freeman's (1993) proposition that *methods of language teaching express beliefs about language learning*.

If it is so that methods are expressions of teachers' beliefs about language learning, then, for example, a method of language teaching that requires lots of repetition by learners is an expression of the belief that language learning is learning a set of habits. The teacher can help to re-

inforce the language by designing exercises that require the learners to repeat.

As soon as we begin to probe, we will note that all language teaching methods proceed from some belief; all express, in the styles of teaching that they encourage, some assumption about how one learns a new language.



In the picture above, we compare methods to a plant that grows out of the soil. In the same way that a plant draws nourishment from the ground, methods find their roots in beliefs about language learning.

If aspiring teachers do not want to become victims of a particular method (and the beliefs that it expresses), then the study of how these methods have influenced our textbooks is particularly important. The following discussion of a number of traditional methods is designed to highlight just how important an influence methods have been in textbooks we use. Many teachers, one must remember, never move beyond the prescribed textbook that is readily available. Thus, if they use the textbook without any reflection on how it builds on a method of language teaching, they unwittingly fall prey to the beliefs about learning embodied in that

method. Worse still, they often uncritically accept the authority of the textbook: if it's written down, it must be good or true. For teachers and learners to benefit from the textbook materials that they use, teachers have to be able to identify the methods that form the backbone of the textbook. If they don't, they set themselves up as victims of the methods that they remain unaware of. Worst of all, they remain caught up in the ways that they were taught, unquestioningly using their own experience as the model for their own students.

The Grammar-translation method

The term 'traditional' approaches is sometimes used loosely to refer to a number of different methods of language teaching. In this chapter, we discuss three methods that are normally included under the umbrella term 'traditional': the Grammar-translation method, the Direct method, and the Audio-lingual method.

The Grammar-translation method is the oldest of these, so we shall begin the discussion of traditional approaches with an overview of what it entails.

As the name indicates, the Grammar-translation method makes much of **translation**. One of its main features is in fact the translation of texts into, and from, the target language (cf. Larsen-Freeman 1986: 4-15 for a detailed discussion). Many learners who have been taught Latin in the twentieth century (and even before!) are familiar with the method.

Not only are texts translated, but the method also emphasises the understanding or comprehension of original literature in the target language.

Taking Latin as an example again, one would expect a proficient learner of Latin to be able to **read** (and **understand**) the classic form of the written language, as found, for example, in the war histories that Caesar wrote, or in the argumentative prose of Cicero’s speeches in the Roman Senate, or even in the beautiful poetry written by Ovidius, a famous Roman poet.

Similarly, if one were learning English, one would be expected to read and appreciate the ‘classics’ of English literature. The aesthetic **appreciation** of the **literature** of the target language is one of the major goals of the Grammar-translation method.

In the Grammar-translation classroom, the relation between the target language and the learner’s initial language is also evident in the idea of ‘cognate’ words. These are words in the initial language that are associated with words in the target language. For example, the English word ‘vision’ derives from the Latin word *video* (‘I see’). The following table gives a flavour of another few English words that are derived from Latin. See if you can complete those which have been omitted:

Latin root	English word
<i>ponere</i> (to place)	position
<i>amare</i> (to love)	amiable
<i>potesse</i> (to be able)	potential
<i>signum</i> (a mark)	_____ ?
<i>collocare</i> (to put together)	_____ ?
<i>exire</i> (to leave)	_____ ?

Furthermore, words within the target language have their own **cognates**, i.e. different classes of words derived from the same root. Let us take another example from English that a learner in a Grammar-translation class might be asked to attend to:

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
beauty	beautify	beautiful	beautifully
_____ ?	_____ ?	grateful	_____ ?
_____ ?	hate	_____ ?	_____ ?

Indeed, this table reveals another characteristic of the Grammar-translation method: the technique of using **fill-in-the-blanks** type of exercises. This is not a unique feature of this method; as we shall see below, it shares this technique with a number of other methods. But it is a technique that seems to be characteristic of all traditional methods.

In a similar way, the Grammar-translation method is associated with **lists** of words that learners have to learn off by heart. Favourites are lists of synonyms or antonyms, or stock phrases such as comparisons:

As like as _____.

As white as _____.

As cunning as _____.

As cool as _____.

To design an exercise to test a list learners' knowledge of synonyms or antonyms, the textbook may come up with an exercise such as the following (taken from Coetzer s.d.: 81):

Write down the missing words in these sentences. They should have the opposite meaning of those in italics:

- (i) Why be so *excited*? yourself.
- (ii) This article is definitely *superior*, not as you maintain.
- (iii) The dealer will offer you the *minimum* price for your used car, not the

Other kinds of lists present us with paradigms which have to be **memorised**, since they are the models on which a number of similar words belonging to the same class are formed. So, for example, in *Macmillan's Shorter Latin course* (Cook 1954), a textbook so popular that, after it was first published in 1886, remained in print until at least the middle of the twentieth century, being reprinted more than 30 times, we find the following model or paradigm (Cook 1954: 77):

Amare, to love

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
1.	<i>Amo, I love.</i>	1.	<i>Amamus, we love.</i>
2.	<i>Amas, you love.</i>	2.	<i>Amatis, you love.</i>
3.	<i>Amat, he loves.</i>	3.	<i>Amant, they love.</i>

The textbook follows up this model by giving a list of words that are similarly conjugated, i.e. that follow the same rules of formation. In English, the most well-known example of such paradigms are the models of regular and irregular verbs (though the latter, as the name implies, have their own, sometimes unique forms). The following paradigm of the different principal parts (infinitive, past tense, past participle) should be familiar to any learner or teacher of English:

	<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past tense</i>	<i>Past participle</i>
regular	{ walk	walked	walked
	{ look	looked	looked
irregular	{ catch	caught	caught
	{ put	put	put

Tied to the idea of modelling the formation of a whole class of words to a single example or paradigm is the feature of **deductive** rule application in the Grammar-translation method (cf. Larsen-Freeman 1986: 14). Having presented to a class of English learners, for example, the model for the formation of the regular past tense of the English verb, learners may be asked to apply this rule of word formation in a subsequent exercise such as the following:

Supply the correct form of the verb in each sentence below:

- (i) We (to escape) the danger of sharks by swimming for the safety of the rocks.
- (ii) From this point, jagged reefs (to project) far out to sea.
- (iii) The clerk (to mark) my account as paid.

Learners are therefore required to memorise various lists of vocabulary, different formation rules for verbs, for nouns and for other parts of speech, and to apply these rules in subsequent exercises.

The true test of the success of language learning, however, is whether one can write or ‘compose’ in the language. Therefore the Grammar-translation method will often require learners to demonstrate their knowledge of the meaning of a word by using it in a sentence. The pinnacle

of language performance in the target language, however, is to be found in the **composition** of an extended text. Very few learners of English through traditional methods will be unfamiliar with this. In Latin, one of the most well-known advanced level textbooks was entitled '*Bradley's Arnold' Latin prose composition* (Mountford 1965). That title captures what in the Grammar-translation method is a learner's supreme accomplishment in the target language.

In English language teaching, too, composition writing has been important. In fact, in the study of English literature 50 or more years ago, much was made of the fact that authors of English novels such as Joseph Conrad were not first language speakers of English. Their success as writers, as composers of written text, bore testimony to how well they had mastered the English language.

What does the Grammar-translation method express about language learning? First, its emphasis on memorisation of lists (of vocabulary) and models (of word formation), tells us that it perceives language as a static body of knowledge that must be, and can be, acquired piecemeal. Memory therefore plays a very important role in the Grammar-translation method. Second, its view of language is a restricted one when viewed from the goal of communication: language serves to express (mostly in writing) rather than to communicate in face to face interaction. It is exactly this emphasis on writing and reading (two of the four 'skills' or modes of language) that led to the Grammar-translation method being pushed aside by methods that emphasised the other skills.

The Direct method

Language teaching took a 90° turn with the Direct method. In contrast to the goals of the Grammar-translation method, in this method no translation is allowed. Instead of an emphasis on reading and writing, the Direct method stresses the importance of conversation or ‘oral’ practice.

Again, few learners of English as another language will be unfamiliar with the notion of doing ‘orals’. In a Direct method classroom, this usually takes the form of learners being asked to prepare a **short talk** or speech about a set topic. These prepared speeches are then delivered orally by individual learners, in turn. Here is an example taken from a textbook that is used in South African secondary schools (Dobie and Piper 1981: 24):

Finding out information

See if you can find information on the following topics ... When you have found the necessary information, you may care to explain the topics orally ...

- a. Thanksgiving Day
- b. Halloween ...
- c. *Uncle Tom's cabin* (the title of a book)
- d. The National Flag of the U.S.A.
- e. The “*Mayflower*”

When one compares this practice with current language teaching techniques, we should note that it does not require interaction, or communication, between learners. Rather, it puts the individual learner’s performance in the target language on display. Though interaction may be implied because the oral speech is delivered to an audience of teacher and co-learners, the latter are rarely called upon to respond.

One way that Direct method teachers have of getting away from this lack of interaction is to set aside at least some classroom time for **debate**. Because the Direct method encourages strict control of learners' language, however, one can understand its preference for interaction in this highly structured form of interaction. Debates have formal rules, and that keeps the language used within predictable limits. Of course, critics of the Direct method would point out that language is otherwise not so predictable, to demonstrate that learners are not exposed by the Direct method to situations that are realistic.

While it shares with the Grammar-translation method a preference for fill-in-the-blanks type of exercises, the difference is that the rules are now applied not deductively, but **inductively**. What this means is that learners are not presented, as in the Grammar-translation method, first with a rule of grammar, as well as an example of its application, and second with a task in which they then have to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge of the rule. Rather, they are exposed to examples from which they have to derive (through a process of induction) their own rules. In the Direct method the rules are inferred from the examples, not the other way around, i.e. deducing the correct form from the application of a rule.

Thus, where the Direct method also likes to use fill-in-the-blanks type of exercises, it would require learners to make their own inferences from a prior set of examples before attempting such tasks. For example, a Direct method teacher might use a set of examples such as the following to expose advanced learners of English to a common concord problem:

Look at the examples below. In the first set, the verb has the correct form:

- (a) The *presentation* to the visiting dignitaries *is* going quite smoothly.
- (b) The *distinctiveness* of these rare birds *lies* in their plumage.

- (c) The *speed* of golf balls *is* determined by a number of factors.
- (d) Their *creation* of these splendid new fashions *has* again gripped our imagination.
- (e) It is unlikely that any *opposition* to these warmongers *carries* the approval of the king.

In the second set, the verb does not have the correct form:

- (f) Not a single one of these fellows *have* ever fired a shot in anger.
- (g) The legs of the rogue elephant *is* thicker than he thought.
- (h) The peel of the new oranges *are* infected by an unknown fungus.
- (i) How do you know that the beach towels of this hotel *is* not to be used at the poolside?
- (j) The course of these three rivers *have* altered many times over the past two centuries.

Can you see why the verbs in the first set [(a) to (e)] are correct, and why those in the second set [(f) to (j)] are incorrect? Formulate your own rule:

Now choose the correct verb in each of the following:

- (k) New methods of harvesting (has/have) done more harm than good.
- (l) The sincerity of his beliefs (has/have) never been in doubt.
- (m) Your influence over these men (is/are) the key to the success of our venture
- (n) Their obedience to the strictures of their various oaths (was/were) their undoing.
- (o) One of the simplest dismissals (was/were) when their opening batsman was stumped.

In order to lessen the necessity for translation, the teacher who uses the Direct method creates as many 'natural' opportunities for learners as she can. This means using 'realia' or real-life, concrete examples. The teacher may ask, for example:

	<i>Expected answer</i>
What is lying on Phumeza's desk?	(It is a pen)
What is lying on my table?	(It is a book)
What is lying on Dirk's desk?	(It is a pencil)
What is lying on the floor?	(It is a piece of paper)

and so on, or, to **expose learners directly** to the language, ask a learner to do an action, and use this as an opportunity for language learning:

Teacher: Vuyani, walk to the door!

(Vuyani gets up and walks to the door)

Teacher: What is Vuyani doing?

Class: He is walking to the door

Teacher: That's right. He is walking to the door. Esther, open the window!

The same cycle of instructions is then repeated, with the class exposed, in each set of questions and answers, to the present continuous tense.

What learning theory does the method subscribe to? The Direct method no doubt also relies heavily on memory, as well as on a direct association between form and meaning, which therefore justifies the direct exposure of the learners to the target language (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 9), without interference from the first language.

We should note, finally, that where the Grammar-translation method focussed on reading and writing, the Direct method emphasises speaking and listening. The former skill is evident in the 'oral' practice that is so characteristic of the method, while the latter is prominent in the emphasis that the Direct method places on techniques such as **dictation**.

The Audio-lingual method

The Audio-lingual method of language teaching is characterized in the first instance by the fact that it is grammatical in orientation. Its obsession is therefore with language structure, and specifically with structural units at and below the level of the sentence. For those who believe in the Audio-lingual method, language is in fact nothing but **structure**. Not only does it therefore identify language with its structural units: it also views language learning as nothing more than the mastery of such structures.

More than any other previous approach, the Audio-lingual method has fostered the notion that there is a 'correct' method of teaching a foreign or second language. It has also made language teaching much easier for teachers to use; many audio-lingual courses have been produced as pre-packaged, ready-to-use materials (cf., for example, Wakeman, 1967), complete with teacher's guides, learners' books, and audio tapes.

For those who are familiar with the history of American linguistics there will be no doubt about the linguistic background of audio-lingualism. It derives its most important theoretical stimulus from the school of descriptive linguistics sometimes referred to as American structuralism. The psychological orientation of the Audio-lingual method is, furthermore, firmly linked to behaviourist psychology, and within that school to stimulus-response theory. This kind of **behaviourism** views language as a habit, and language learning is therefore equated with the learning of a set of habits. The method of learning prescribed is that of **repetition** (in order to facilitate habit-formation), and the technique used in achieving this is to expose

learners to the structural patterns (of phrases, sentences, etc.) of the language.

There are very few teachers today who do not know the now familiar principles of audio-lingualism:

- *speaking comes before writing*: we learn language in a particular order, namely that of listening first, then speaking, reading and writing;
- *'basic' sentences must precede more complex ones* (because we learn by analogy rather than by analysis);
- *language patterns must become language habits*;
- *vocabulary must be restricted* (because the sounds and the structures of a language constitute the primary lingual material);
- *teachers must concentrate their efforts on the problems, i.e. on the structural differences between units and patterns in the first and second language*;
- *teach the language as it is*, and not as it is supposed to be, according to the dictates of some authority;
- *the language content of the course must be graded strictly according to grammatical criteria*, i.e. a grammatically simpler phenomenon, such as the singular form of a noun, must be learned before a structurally more complex form, like the plural;
- *let the student speak the language* (instead of translating);
- *an incomplete or erroneous response is unacceptable* as end product, and must immediately be corrected (lest it become a habit);
- *learners must identify with the target culture*, i.e. if they are learning English, they must think in English.

Most of these principles have today become, among practising teachers, part of the conventional wisdom of their profession. In many of these principles and practices, however, the theoretical starting points of structuralist linguistics and behaviourist psychology remain prominent, especially in those that require drill and repetition.

The most important tenet of audio-lingualism that concerns us here, though, is that language acquisition (viewed as the acquisition of structure) is the ultimate objective, and not the inherent relevance, interest or entertainment value of the language teaching material. The learning of a second or foreign language is viewed as a more or less mechanical process of adopting certain habits, and these habits must be **reinforced** by eliminating errors. It is easy to see, therefore, how the language laboratory, where errors can be identified and corrected immediately, became such an influential and sophisticated instrument in the hands of those who enthusiastically adopted the Audio-lingual method. The new set of habits (the target language) has to be learned and reinforced at all costs.

The elegant simplicity and power of the Audio-lingual method lay in the fact that it brought together the founding principles of linguistics and psychology with a view to refining language teaching methods. It could flex ‘scientific’ muscles at all disbelievers, claiming to be a **correct** (in the sense of ‘scientifically founded’) method of teaching.

It is to this simplicity and power that the tremendous influence of the Audio-lingual method should probably be ascribed. But — and this is the crucial point — in its bringing together of insights from psychology and linguistics also lay its fundamental weakness and vulnerability. In theoretical linguistics, descriptive structuralism exists today only as an episode in the history of the field, since its starting points have been thoroughly overtaken,

especially in the philosophy that underlies the work of transformational grammarians. Behaviourist psychology too, specifically as regards the mechanistic interpretation of stimulus-response theory, no longer occupies pride of place in the field of modern cognitive and interactional psychology. Thus, as Lamendella (1979) has pointed out, mechanical drills are incapable of enhancing the learner's capacity to communicate, since, during pattern practice drills, learners may actually disengage those functions of the brain that are associated with high level language processing. Why would learners use high level functions for performing a simple, repetitious task?

Today the Audio-lingual method is not only theoretically discredited, but also subject to pedagogical doubts. Many language teachers have no doubt asked themselves: is language indeed no more than structure? Is language as neatly packaged as in an audio-lingual course? Can we equate a language with its sentences? Is it correct, simply judging by experience, to assume that a second/foreign language can be learned by repetition? Is the strict order in which language skills are presented (speaking before writing and reading, etc.) not contrived and artificial when we compare it with learning in settings other than classrooms? Is there a 'correct' method of language teaching? And how effective, finally, is the Audio-lingual method when it comes to the learning of communicative skills?

It is no coincidence that teachers and course designers began, during the later phases of audio-lingualism, to make courses more communicative and interactive in nature, sometimes succeeding in such attempts with great skill and imagination. So, instead of the decontextualized repetition of the single question:

What's this?

with the minimally varied response

It's a pen
 It's a hen
 It's a mat
 It's a cat

we began to see exercises that were bound to more interesting and relevant contexts. Thus Wakeman (1967), giving a drawing of a puddle, requires from students to answer the following variations of the question

How are	}	we	}	going to get through the water?
		they		
is	}	John		
		she		

with the following (patterned) answers:

Well, we (they/John/she) can walk around it if we (they/he/she) want(s)!

While the method of repetition remains basically the same — structures are still being drilled in the clinical circumstances of the language laboratory — this example does show a significant measure of **contextualization** and interaction. The particular course (*English Fast*) from which these examples have been taken, gently mocks the audio-lingual principle that the results of the teaching design are important, not the entertainment value of the material. This slyly humorous undertone is evidence of self-criticism, by the author, of the serious ‘principles’ of audio-lingualism.

Apart from this late development within audio-lingualism, another positive feature of the Audio-lingual method is that, though it emphasises a particular, rigid order in which we learn the four language ‘skills’ (listening, speaking, reading and writing), good audio-lingual courses often combine all four skills. Unlike the previous two methods we considered, therefore, the

Audio-lingual method tries to focus eventually on the use of all the media or skills in the target language. We can summarise it in the following table, which surveys how the ‘productive’ (speaking and writing) and ‘receptive’ (listening and reading) skills — as they were called at the time when these methods were fashionable² — are variously emphasised in the three traditional methods:

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Grammar-translation method	—	—	✓	✓
Direct method	✓	✓	—	—
Audio-lingual method	✓	✓	✓	✓

This table clearly shows how audio-lingualism seeks to improve upon the shortcomings of the other two traditional methods.

No matter how much improvement there was, however, these traditional methods gave way, at the end of the 1970’s, to a new trend in language teaching. This is the topic of the next chapter.

Conclusion

Before we turn to the discussion of current approaches, let us consider again the observations we made at the beginning of the chapter. At the beginning of our discussion, we took as a point of departure that methods express beliefs about language learning. Consideration of language teaching methods is today done with some caution, in particular because some commentators have ascribed the ascendancy of one method over another simply to political

². Today, we would think of all four ‘skills’ as productive, or interactive, stressing, for example, that listening is an interactive, not a passive, activity, during which we construct meaning with those

factors. In other words, there are some who today attempt to explain the fashionability of a particular method merely in terms of the power relations that enfold it: one sticks to a method because of the economic, social or professional influences that accompany its use. In this view, ideological considerations therefore explain changes in language teaching fashions.

This is a valuable point of view, since it correctly points out that we do not achieve progress because of advances in science, i.e. once we attain ‘scientific’ explanations — or, better still, prescriptions — for the ways in which languages should be taught. This critique of methods is a reminder that changes in language teaching do not come about as a result of scientific work, as adherents of the Audio-lingual method would have it.

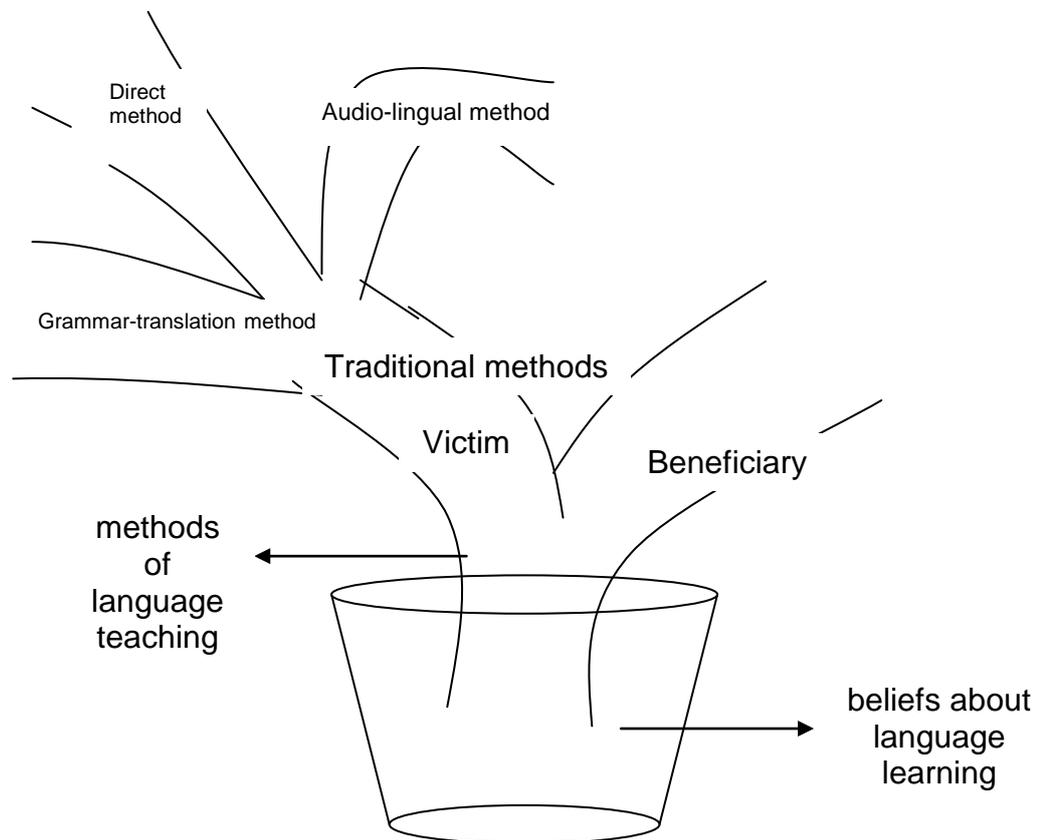
Our discussion takes the explanation offered another step forward, by noting that there are more motivations for adopting change than political ones. Teachers adopt different methods so as to bring their teaching into alignment with their beliefs about language learning. Our proposition is that teachers commit to certain designs for language teaching because they wish to teach with integrity, i.e. to achieve a consistency between how they think their learners are learning, and how they teach.

This is also the interpretation that one should attach to the term ‘learner-centred’ which is often used to describe new approaches in comparison with traditional ones (which, by this definition, would be teacher-centred; though one might prefer the term ‘teacher-fronted classroom’ for the sake of accuracy). Language teaching that aligns teachers’ beliefs about language learning with the design of their teaching is in that sense learner-centred, since it is mindful of how learners learn the target language, and thus sensitive to learners’ needs.

we are listening to. The same goes for reading: the author of the text we read engages with us as (anticipated) readers in actively making meaning of the text as one proceeds.

We should also note that, for the greater part, teachers who adopted the traditional methods discussed here have often become their victims, instead of their beneficiaries. The discussion below will therefore also focus on whether current approaches to language teaching can make teachers beneficiaries.

If we can return, then, to the image that we used at the beginning of this chapter, in which we used the growth of a plant to illustrate the adoption of a language teaching methodology, it would now look like this:



3 Communicative language teaching: origins and mainstream

THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING HAS come, in the first instance, as a reaction against the traditional methods discussed before. What does this approach present as an alternative to traditional methods? Where does it derive its inspiration from? What made it gain ground rapidly since the beginning of the 1980's, so that it is today probably regarded as the reigning orthodoxy in language teaching?

As Roberts (1982) has remarked, this is not the first time in the history of language teaching that 'communication' has become the

objective. The history of language teaching is in fact characterized by a vacillation between literary/aesthetic aims and social or communicative objectives. Today, as before, the **social aim** is once more primary. This is the case even among those who still use what we now call ‘traditional’ methods of language teaching. The difference this time lies in the ways proposed for realizing this aim. It is also to be found in the way that the approach is justified with reference to theoretical ideas.

In this respect, the influence of the idea of **communicative competence** (cf. Hymes 1971, but also Searle 1969, Habermas 1970 and Halliday 1978) is today in evidence in language teaching more than any other linguistic notion. The success of any kind of language teaching, and perhaps specifically second language teaching, is judged in terms of how it measures up to the objective of teaching ‘communication’, and enabling learners to become communicatively competent in the target language.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is variously understood and interpreted. This is because it embodies a variety of **different directions**. We shall discuss below a number of different interpretations of CLT, noting what makes each unique, and also what makes them cohere as ‘communicative’ (instead of say, grammatical) language instruction.

Authentic texts

Pedagogical doubts about the merits of teaching decontextualized bits of language, as in audio-lingual teaching, are an important motivation for teachers to adopt communicative language teaching. The communicative

approach arose, one should remember, partly as reaction against audio-lingualism.

The use of authentic texts in designing language teaching constitutes the first direction within CLT we discuss here. This (historically) first kind of communicative language teaching places much emphasis on the use of ‘texts’ from ordinary or specialized contexts, be it for the purposes of reading, discussion, making deductions, learning to write, or collating and summarising information.

The aim of bringing language teaching closer to the language that we use in real life is not completely foreign to audio-lingual teaching, especially in some later courses, as we have noted above. Indeed, the use of ‘realia’ or real life objects is not foreign to the Direct method either. The use of **authentic texts** takes this idea one step further, however, by selecting texts, i.e. real stretches of language, from everyday life. It also uses the texts differently, and more imaginatively, than traditional methods, that tested merely their comprehension, i.e. whether they were understood.

In designing language teaching tasks around authentic texts, one may choose to use the most ordinary and everyday sort of texts, such as bus time tables or train schedules, or quite specialised discourse, such as one finds in complex academic texts. While later developments showed that modifications may be made to texts encountered outside the classroom so as to facilitate learning and teaching, the initial emphasis was on using unmodified, authentic material.

The difference, however, lies in the way that one treats such texts. Where the grammar-translation method promoted an aesthetic appreciation and understanding of a text, those CLT designs that worked with authentic

texts used such texts for the sake of **extracting information** from them. In what is generally characteristic of communicative teaching, the emphasis is not only on understanding the texts, but on what one can do with this comprehension afterwards, i.e. in how one use the information.

Another difference with traditional, grammar-based teaching lies in the fact that this kind of CLT goes **beyond the** level of the **sentence** (the highest structural unit in a grammatical hierarchy). The idea that foreign and second language teaching should be paying attention to units of language above and beyond the level of the sentence is therefore important in this type of communicative teaching. If one is looking for a motivation to use authentic texts, what better reason than that, by using authentic materials, the teacher could give attention to those grammatical constructions and vocabulary that went unheeded in our (always limited) grammatical insights and descriptions. And what better place to find such larger units of language than in real-life texts?

Many traditional language teachers who encounter this direction within CLT for the first time remark that authentic texts have always been used as classroom materials by good teachers, although this might have been for only a small proportion of classroom time. In fact, many teachers enthusiastically adopt the idea of using newspapers in the classroom. Without disparaging such effort, the observation that we should make is that often it is done not in a deliberate but in an eclectic fashion, without any real thought to communicative objectives.

The main reason why this trend began to gain influence in language teaching was probably that it was thought capable of capturing the **interest**

of the learner, thus also increasing his or her motivation to learn the language (Cook, 1981).

The most influential work done in this direction of communicative teaching most probably is that of Widdowson (cf., for example, Widdowson, 1978). Also closely associated with this kind of CLT is the so-called ‘Language across the curriculum’ movement, which sees language instruction as an integral part of the teaching of other subjects, such as mathematics, natural science, history, biology, and so forth. It is obvious why the idea of teaching language for specific purposes has derived some justification from this kind of communicative teaching.

If the use of authentic texts in the classroom constitutes but one type of communicative teaching, what are the others? We return to a consideration of these directions in communicative teaching below, but first wish to consider one basic characteristic of communicative teaching, which gives coherence to CLT across every different interpretation it has.

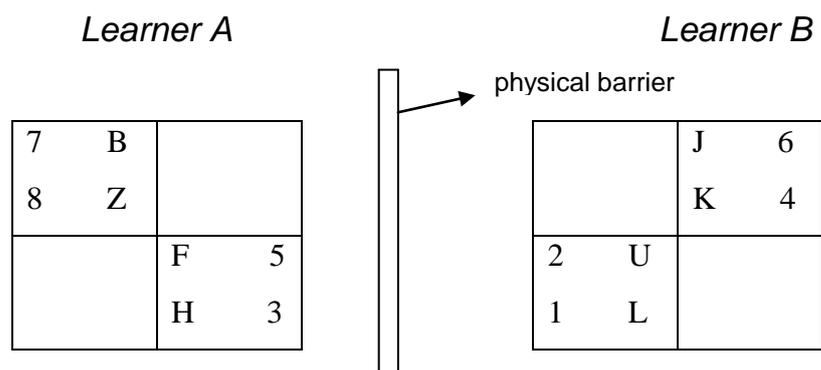
Information gap technique

One technique constitutes a criterion for identifying all those directions in language teaching that claim to be ‘communicative’. Language teaching that claims to be communicative is always characterized by the employment of this one basic technique: the (lingual bridging of an) **information gap**. Textbooks and courses that do not utilise this technique — no matter what claims are made in their introductions in the form of an acknowledging nod to Hymes (1971) — are simply not communicative.

An information gap exercise is invariably based on the principle of A knowing something that B does not know, and that A (after perhaps being requested by B) must tell or inform B, or direct and instruct him or her, or explain, or do whatever is appropriate in the situation so that B may also know, understand, act, etc. An information gap presupposes that there are at least two parties involved in the language process, and in the type of teaching exercise that proceeds from this premiss *lingual expression is elevated to the level of authentic communication.*

Information gap exercises may be fairly simple ones that are made possible by putting up a physical barrier between the participants at talk. In fact, the attractiveness of these exercises lies in the fact that they can often be done with the most modest of means: by using a piece of cardboard or even a large book as concrete physical barrier, for example, one student may be asked to give instructions to another on building a model similar to his/hers with a few blocks that have been given to both. Completing the model is a collaborative effort in which language plays a major role.

The information exchanged can really be of any kind; in the following example, we see that learner A has a sheet with some information that is missing from the sheet that learner B has. Similarly, learner B has information that will complete the missing parts of learner A's sheet. Here are the two sheets they have for this information exchange task:



Once learner A and learner B have communicated to each other across the physical barrier the information that they each have a sheet equally divided into four rectangles, they proceed to fill in the missing information on their own sheet by exchanging and checking information with their partner, until each has a completed sheet. Their sheets should look like this:

7	B	J	6
8	Z	K	4
2	U	F	5
1	L	H	3

The point of such exercises is to create the opportunity for the student to use the target language in a piece of authentic communication — something that the audio-lingual method aimed at, but was never quite successful in realizing.

Developments within what is known today as the communicative approach have been so simultaneous and so varied that, in spite of the fact that they may all be characterized by their employment of this one basic technique, ‘communicative language teaching’ is no more than another umbrella term for different directions within one broad **approach**. This is one reason why the term ‘approach’ is to be preferred when one refers to this kind of language teaching. Another is that, since the days of audio-

lingualism, the alternative term, ‘method’, has always conjured up the image of rigour and inflexibility, of ‘correctness’ of teaching technique, and of an almost dogmatic adherence to a set of theoretically justified principles. All these are positions to which the communicative approach has responded negatively. In what follows we shall therefore be looking more closely at the different directions this response has taken.

Communicative language teaching: the mainstream

Probably the most influential direction in communicative language teaching is the so-called British school, which has remained a very influential interpretation of CLT. This direction grew out of work commissioned by the Council of Europe. In this kind of teaching the requirement is that the language syllabus must be related to the real language needs of students, and the emphasis is therefore not on structures that are learned and filled with ‘meaning’ only afterwards; the emphasis is on **meaning** right from the start.

Especially in the influential work of Wilkins (1976) the various uses or **functions** of language are central. The different grammatical realisations of these functions (such as making judgements, requesting, voicing approval, giving advice, arguing, persuading, etc.) are considered only after the various functions themselves have been identified. For example, the function of greeting may have different grammatical realisations:

Hi!

Hello!

Good morning!

Good afternoon, everybody, on this fine sunny day at Newlands, where the Proteas are in a very strong position against the touring Sri Lankan team.

It is obvious that the preference of one of these grammatical realisations of the same function ('greeting') will depend upon the use which is appropriate in each case. CLT emphasises the **appropriateness** of the language used.

CLT views language learning as a more integrative process than is the case in audio-lingualism, which implicitly accepted that the different elements of grammatical structure that are taught must in some way be synthesised by the learner. The explicit aim of CLT is to make the learner communicatively competent in the second or foreign language. Although, initially, CLT was not prompted by any specific theory of language learning, it afterwards came to be justified in terms of **interactionist** models of language learning. In South Africa, it also found strong justification in constructivism, i.e. in theories that understand learning in terms of how one jointly, with others, makes meaning of something new. In this view, acquiring language is understanding it, and such understanding is collaboratively constructed in interaction with others.

Since the establishment of the real (functional) **language needs** of students has top priority in this type of communicative language teaching, it results in a kind of teaching that is done not for its own sake, but for some purpose lying outside of the classroom. This explains to some extent why this approach is so attractive to both students and teachers. Its emphasis is not in the first instance on knowledge about the language, but on the ability to use it appropriately in different situations.

The priority given to the language needs of students also explains the importance attached to **syllabus design**. A language syllabus must be based on such needs only after a careful analysis of the following five contours (cf. Littlewood, 1981: 82-84):

- (a) the different *situations* in which students may be required to use the target language;
- (b) the various *topics* that are relevant in such situations;
- (c) the different *media* (telephone, letter) and/or *skills* (listening, speaking, reading and writing) through which communication is made possible in the relevant situations;
- (d) the possible language *functions* (for example for greeting, requesting, apologising, thanking, etc.) that have the greatest prominence in the situations identified under (a);
- (e) the *grammatical forms* that are the possible realisations of such communicative functions in the different situations.

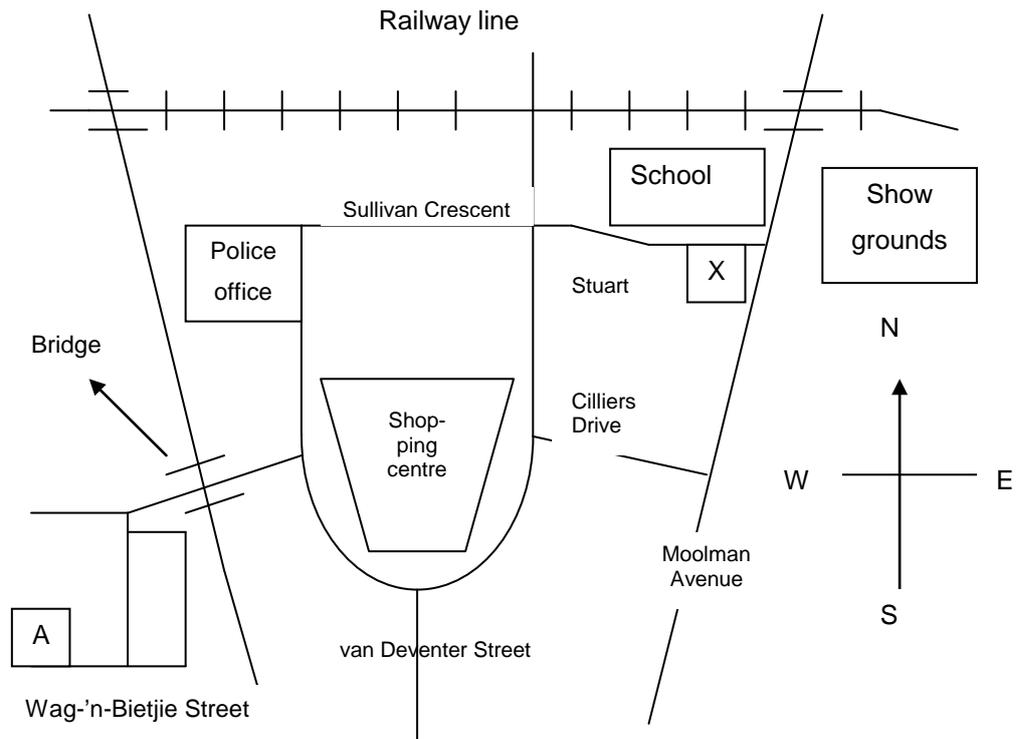
Such analyses may be used either in the design of general courses or for ones in language for specific purposes (LSP).

As we have noted above, CLT in all its different variations has an information gap technique as the foundation for the language learning tasks it designs for learners. Consider what (new) information is being communicated in the following task translated and adapted slightly from an intermediate level Afrikaans second language course (van Jaarsveld & Weideman 1985: 30):

Read the following:

You: (cause the telephone to ring)
 Friend: Three-double-one-six-four-two. Hallo.
 You: Hallo!
 Friend: Hallo
 You:
 Friend:
 You:
 Listen, yesterday when I phoned I forgot to ask how one gets to your home. Where exactly is Wag-'n-Bietjie Street?

Use the following map of your town. Let X be your house, at the corner of Stuart Street and Moolman Avenue, and A be the house of your friend in Wag-'n-Bietjie Street. First complete and practice the missing part of the above dialogue with a partner, together with the subsequent explanation of how to get from X to A. Then swap roles, and let your partner ask you how to get to your home.



How much new information do the partners exchange in this exercise? It is clear that there is enough unpredictability in the directions that they will give. This is a feature of tasks that have information gaps as the basis for the communication. In this kind of task, the interaction is shaped by the nature of the task as a **role play**, a kind of exercise where the participants at talk also have to adapt to the exact circumstances of the particular information exchange to be able to use the appropriate language.

Let us take another role play task as an example of this type of exercise. It comes from an advanced English second language course (Weideman 1985: 29-30):

Making arrangements

Your employer has left the office in a hurry before you arrive at work, and leaves the following note on your desk:

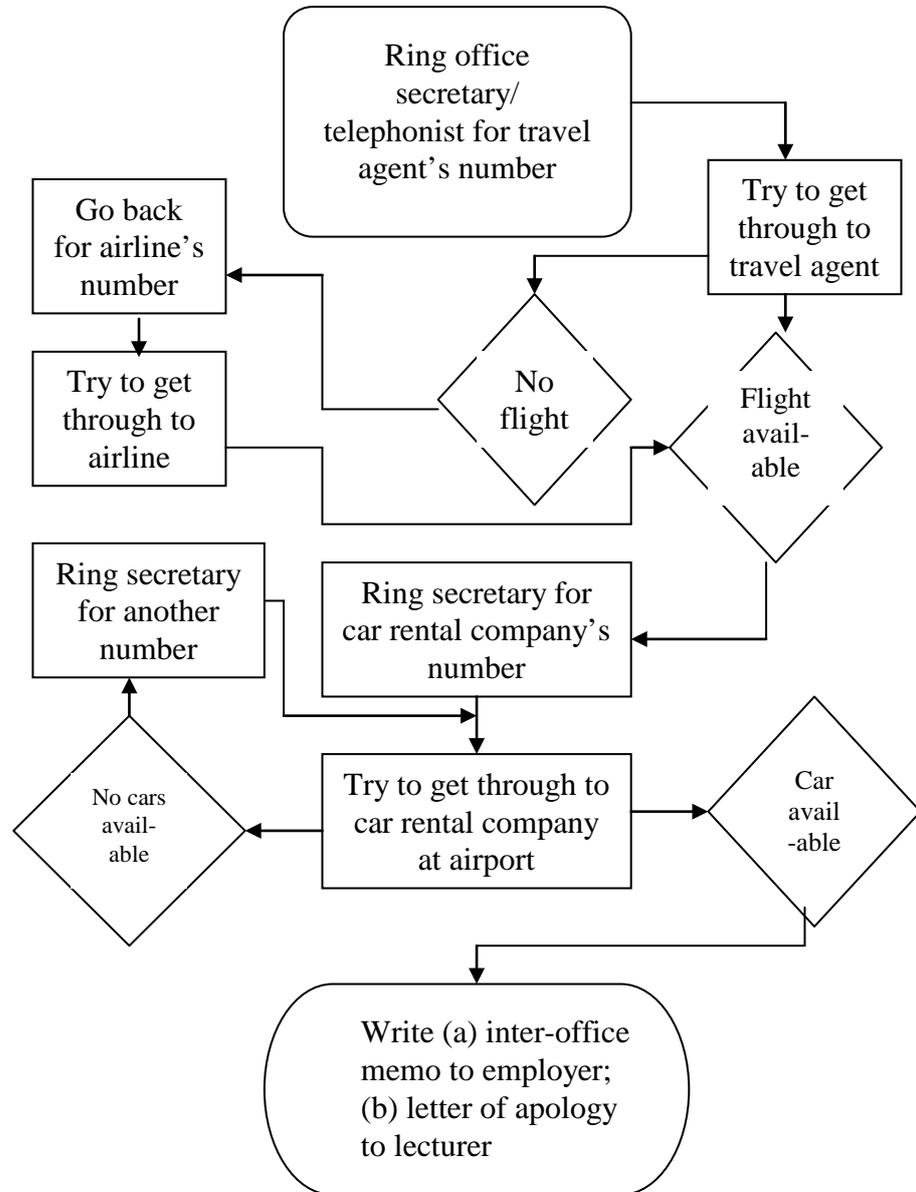
Inter-office memo	Date
	<i>Monday</i>
From: <i>Arthur Jones</i>	
To: <i>J. van den Berg</i>	
Please book two seats for us on tomorrow afternoon's flight to Cape Town — we have to conclude the Walters-van Heerden deal before Thursday, and I'm afraid you'll have to ask permission to miss classes on Tuesday and Wednesday evening.	

Work in pairs, one assuming the role of Johan van den Berg, the other that of the secretary/travel agent/airline official/car rental company assistant,

etc., deciding first what you would say at each stage ... then practising it as a series of dialogues.

As the last step both should write an inter-office memo to Mr Jones, as well as letters of apology to lecturers for not being able to attend classes.

Consider the following course of action:



What is noteworthy here is, again, that at every stage of the dialogues that each pair of learners engages in, there are information gaps (What is the telephone number of the travel agent, or the car rental company? Which car

rental company will have a car available? What are the exact arrangements that Johan will report back on to his employer? What specifically will Johan say in the letter of apology, i.e. what will be his particular excuse for missing class?).

But there is an additional point to note here, which is that this role play exercise requires learners to employ all four skills. It **combines the skills** of reading (the memo), speaking (to the secretary, the travel agent, and so forth), listening (for the information given) and writing (to convey the arrangements or apologize).

Moreover, a **variety of functions** is used. There are telephonic greetings (with someone, the receptionist, whom one knows well; with another, the travel agent, whom one doesn't know that well); the greetings themselves are closing and opening greetings; there are polite enquiries (for all kinds of information); making arrangements (both orally and in writing); and so on. The role play combines many elements that prepare learners for communication in the target language through a simulation of real life talk. This explains some of the popularity of such exercises in CLT.

The fact that the communicative task also simulates real life language derives from the fact that, when this course was being designed, a **needs analysis** was first undertaken (see above). The course was designed for students who were going to work in an office setting, where English would often be the language of communication. In an investigation of this context, the situations, topics frequently encountered, the different media (telephone, written memoranda, notes), functions (and their various grammatical forms) were identified, and built into the course.

Role plays can also be combined with elements of the first direction within CLT, which is characterised by the use of authentic texts. Consider the following set of communicative tasks, again adapted from the advanced English second language course, *Making certain* (Weideman 1985: 26-27). For the follow-up task, learners would either be supplied with small advertisements, or have been asked to bring examples of their own to class. In this exercise, Peter Smith has been asked by his employer to find a house to buy or to rent for someone who is joining their firm at the end of the month. Smith finishes his other work, takes up the newspaper, and sees advertisements like these:

FOR SALE

Milnerton Owner transferred. Sunny, spacious single storey 3 bdrmd house under tiled roof. Convenient corner position. 2 bathrms, double garage. Sole agents WP Sales 21-2400 a/h 52-64342.

TO LET

Pinelands 3 bdrms, attic room, pool. Avail. Sept. 1 R4500 pm neg. Ph Durr Estates Letting 654132/3

He phones the secretary.

Peter: Molly, what does 'B .. D .. R .. M .. D' mean in an advertisement for a house?

Molly: It means 'bedroomed', of course!

Peter: Of course. And 'N .. E .. G'?

Molly: You mean 'negotiable'?

Peter: Yes, that's it. How stupid of me!

Now look for four further pairs of such advertisements in the material that you have brought with you, and, having selected them, check with a friend the meaning of the unusual abbreviations they contain, in the same way as above.

This task can, of course, be followed up by setting the learners a writing task (composing their own small advertisements, or writing a memo to the employer who requires feedback on progress).

This example also illustrates that the interpretation that many teachers have of CLT, that it emphasises only the spoken form of the language, is wrong. Of course, this mistaken interpretation is often related to teachers' own professional histories: when one has struggled to teach 'oral' as required by the Direct method, the great variety of speaking tasks encountered in CLT is like a gift from above. One then thinks of CLT tasks as just another addition to the 'oral' or conversation practice of one's essentially Direct method style of teaching.

There are several problems connected with this direction of communicative teaching. One is that, given the unpredictability of conversational and other kinds of talk, it requires (sometimes very) skilful and competent teachers. Also, language functions are less easy to grade in terms of difficulty than grammatical structures, and decisions on what should be taught at a certain stage in a course are therefore more problematic than in a grammar-based course. A counter-argument here is of course that there is no evidence that we necessarily learn first the grammatically simple construction (say, the singular) before mastering the grammatically complex (the plural). In fact, there is no evidence that we learn a new language one grammatical step at a time, and so the problem of how to grade the content of a language course cannot be solved in terms of grading from grammatically simple to grammatically complex forms.

This is not to say that CLT does not attend to **grammar**. In fact, a great deal of thought has gone into the teaching of grammar, and some role

play exercises are designed exactly for this purpose. In the following example, translated and adapted from *Doelgerigte Afrikaans* (van Jaarsveld & Weideman 1985: 35), learners practice the conversion of direct into indirect speech (marked →) in a role play:

You are introduced to your friend's deaf grandfather. The conversation proceeds like this:

Annemarie: Grandpa, I'd like to introduce you to Hilton.

Grandfather: Who?

Annemarie: Hilton, Grandpa.

Grandfather: Hilton who?

Annemarie: Hilton Cowley, Grandpa. Hilton, this is my grandfather Jacob.

Hilton: How do you do, sir?

Grandfather: How do you do, my boy. So you're the new boyfriend?

Hilton: Eh, ... I ...

Annemarie: Grandpa, please!

Grandfather: Where are you from, young man?

Hilton: From Eshowe, sir.

Grandfather: Where does he say he's from, dear?

→ Annemarie: He says he's from Eshowe, grandpa.

Grandfather: And what does your father do for a living, son?

Hilton: He's a farmer, sir.

Grandfather: What does he say does his father do, dear?

→ Annemarie: He says his father is a farmer, grandpa.

Now add two more possible questions by the grandfather, which have to be answered first by Hilton, and then have to be repeated by Annemarie, in the same manner as in the dialogue above, before practising it together with two other learners. Take turns to assume the role of the boy, the girl and the grandfather, so that everyone gets an opportunity.

Mainstream CLT has been criticised on a number of counts, not the least that it has too technical and narrow an interpretation of the concept of 'learners' needs'. Indeed, both directions within communicative teaching discussed above, the 'Authentic text' interpretation and mainstream CLT, are characterised by an emphasis on 'L' (for language) (cf. Roberts 1982). As we shall see below, this is not the only emphasis within CLT, and there are other directions that interpret learners' needs differently.

The most important problem for CLT, however, concerns the question of whether English language teaching, in adopting a communicative approach, has perhaps not once again fallen prey to a teaching ideology. There is little comfort to be derived from leaving behind one (behaviourist, grammatical) ideology, and simply exchanging it for a new (perhaps somewhat friendlier) social or sociological one. Whatever qualms one may have in this regard, however, the communicative approach remains one that stimulates the pedagogical imagination and tolerates far more idiosyncrasies than a more rigorously defined method would. It signals a clear departure from the notion of a 'correct' method of language teaching, and, though it takes the focus off language, it gives us, paradoxically perhaps, a much broader vision of language than any of the approaches and methods it has displaced.

4 Psychological emphases in Communicative language teaching

‘L’ and ‘P’ emphases in CLT

IN THE THIRD DIRECTION WITHIN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE teaching that will be discussed here, we are dealing with methods and techniques which strongly emphasise the emotional aspects of the teaching and learning situation. Hence the labelling of these as ‘P’ methods (for psychological) in contrast with those that are ‘L’ (for language) in emphasis, like mainstream communicative teaching (for this distinction, cf. Roberts 1982).

This **emotional** emphasis is part also of the so-called humanistic methods of language teaching, such as the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, as well as Counseling-Learning and Community Language Learning (for a survey, see Stevick, 1980; Larsen-Freeman 1986). In these, the focus is on the ‘whole’ learner, and on the personality of the student in its fullest sense. The sometimes exotic techniques (cf. for example the almost totally silent teacher in the Silent Way) employed by these, and their effectiveness, is part of another discussion.

What remains important in the ‘P’ approaches, though, is the reaction that we find here against the mechanical elements in traditional methods. The most concrete way in which this reaction manifests itself can be found in the particular attention that is given to play and **drama techniques** in language teaching today. In contrast to the relatively low entertainment value of, for example, the audio-lingual method, the element of play, when introduced into the classroom, almost automatically raises the interest value of the teaching. We consider the uses of this in the following section.

Play and drama techniques

Drama techniques usually include games and activities in which language plays a crucial part. Yet, while learners have ample opportunity to practice the language, the focus does not appear to be on language. Let us look in turn first at activities and then at games.

In the activities of which examples are given here (adapted from Rinvolucri, 1982; cf. too Frank & Rinvolucri, 1983), the emphasis is not

B: Yes./Right!

Or it may be somewhat more amusing if the guess is wrong:

A: I think you very seldom get letters from him.

B: Wrong!/No. But I very seldom have enough pocket money!

After completing this, the grammatical expressions relating to different degrees of certainty can be tried out by the pairs who have exchanged information:

Can it be that you very seldom get up in time?

I have an idea that you go to the cinema very often.

Is it (really) so/true that you never give your small sister any chocolates?

I am almost certain you sometimes eat cauliflower.

I am convinced that you often get letters from him.

I presume you always wear jeans in winter?

I doubt whether you ever learn for exams!

We have an example here of an activity that is concerned with self-knowledge as well as with knowledge of language structure; again the focus is not in the first instance on language, but on the whole human being.

The same is true of **games** that are used in language teaching today. There are many interesting ideas for games to be found in books such as Maley & Duff (1978) and Wright, Betteridge & Buckby (1979),³ from which the examples given here are taken. Let us look at a few of these.

A very enjoyable game is 'Alibis'. Learners work in pairs: they decide (without writing anything down) on a series of imaginary events which are presumed to have taken place at some specific time during the previous week when they were supposed to have been in each other's

³ both of which have since been published in new, revised and enlarged editions.

company, so that each has an alibi. One member of a pair is sent outside while the class has the chance of interrogating the other. When this has been done, the other is invited in and questioned, until the alibi is cracked or appears to hold water (the latter is seldom the case!).

Another guessing game is ‘Predicaments’. One member of a pair of students decides on a specific predicament. The other then has the opportunity, by asking questions (“What would you have done first if you found yourself in this predicament? ... And then?”) to try to determine what the predicament was. As in the familiar ‘Twenty questions’, one would set a limit as to the number of questions allowed to the person who is guessing.

One further example of a useful game is ‘Pocket biography’. The teacher divides the class into groups of six or seven. To each group is given a handbag or book-bag that contains different items such as train/bus tickets, invoices, city maps as well as other documents and paraphernalia. Ideally, each bag must contain the same materials, though this is not an absolute necessity. The different groups must then try to establish the identity and movements of the person to whom the bag belongs (on the presumption that the person involved has been run over by a car, or has left the bag behind somewhere, etc.).

Again, one should note that in all of these drama exercises an information gap is present. This feature is shared by all directions within CLT.

Why would one use games and drama techniques in language learning?

One argument is that these techniques often require the minimum of resources (‘Alibis’, for example, requires nothing more than an active

imagination). Also, they can easily be used to practice a point of grammar (the same game powerfully provides for practice of the past continuous and simple past tenses). For example, using a pack of cards, and turning the cards over one or more cards at a time, the teacher may ask, and expect the following answers, that all give learners practice in that function of the present continuous tense that is used to indicate future time in English:

Teacher: What is the next card going to be?
Learner(s): It's going to be a diamond.
Teacher: It's not. It's a spade. What is the next card going to be?
Learner(s): It's going to be a heart.
Teacher: That's right. What are the next two cards going to be?
Learner(s): They're going to be a club and a spade.
Teacher: They're not. They're a club and a diamond.

The same exercise could, of course, be used to practice singulars and plurals, or the simple present tense.

Another powerful argument for using play and drama techniques is that such activities, by taking the focus off language, generate less stress for anxious learners than conventional teaching. The less anxiety learners feel, the more likely they are to learn the target language.

Discussion exercises

The same motivation applies to the use of discussion exercises. Teachers who employ them often do so because they stimulate a lot of verbal interaction among learners, who get carried away by their enthusiasm to make their own arguments prevail, and in the process forget about their **anxiety** not to make mistakes in learning a new language.

There is no doubt that debates and discussion **generate** as much **talk** as one may wish for. Two favourites that I often use are the desert island discussion “What do I take with me?” and a “What to do with the money ...” task. The first of these entails an imaginary situation of one being exiled on a desert island, and being allowed to take along only 12 items. The island has a temperate climate, with adequate rain right through the year, lush vegetation, a great variety of small animals, and temperatures ranging between 17° and 27° Celsius. Some of the more imaginative answers that learners in my classes have come up with include a bag of salt, and living initially in the container into which all the items, including a solar powered generator for driving small electric appliances, are packed. To get the most out of this discussion, one allows learners to make their individual lists first, then to compile a list combining their own and that of a friend, thereafter arguing it out with another pair to see which 12 items the four of them would agree on, and so on, until there are only two groups left to present their definitive lists to the class.

The second discussion I like using, “What to do with the money ...”, involves receiving a windfall as a company, or a donation or inheritance as a church community or voluntary association, and deciding as a small group (no more than 4 or 5 learners, but preferably fewer) among a set of priorities how much should be spent on each. Take the following example:

You are a member of the management team of a small manufacturing industry. For many years larger companies completely ignored your company, but last year you landed a huge contract with a big multi-national company to supply a component part for one of their mass produced products. This has attracted wide attention, and latest estimates are that in your current financial year your profits would increase by at least R40 million.

The Chief Executive Officer of your company has asked each department to come up with a plan on how the money should be used. For which of the following items on his list of priorities do you recommend that money be spent, and what percentage of the expected R40 million windfall should each item receive?

Priority 1: *Develop employees educationally* (67% of workforce is illiterate)

Priority 2: *Develop proper human resource management* (Finance and admin are currently handled by the same department)

Priority 3: *Develop physical capacity* (Some machines are getting quite old)

Priority 4: *Beef up security system* (Every year, the company loses heavily through theft)

Priority 5: *Communications and advertising* (Company has no special function dealing with this)

Priority 6: *Gaining a technological edge* (Can the company succeed without investing into new systems and ideas?)

As you discuss these priorities in small groups, make your own assumptions about the present situation of your company. But make a note of these assumptions to clarify your position when you express it. You must be prepared to defend and back up each allocation (and the proportion spent) with sound argument.

It is easy to see how one could modify this discussion for use in another imaginary situation (church community, family, educational institution, and so on). It is guaranteed to produce a good amount of uninhibited talk.

Discussions also allow one to relieve the tension among learners at the beginning of a new language class. Such **ice-breakers** are very popular, and most of them actually belong to the previous category (play and drama techniques). One that fits into the category of discussion is for the teacher to take the trouble before class to find out some personal details of learners. The class is then required to “Find someone who ...” uniquely fits a certain piece of information. Though the questions would vary for every class, here is a possible set of questions, as a sample:

FIND SOMEONE IN CLASS WHO ...

1. was recently out of the country.
2. has a birthday in the same month as yours.
3. is the eldest child in the family.
4. has been further north than you've been.
5. comes from a different province than the one you're from.
6. has one major subject that is different from yours.
7. lives further away from campus than you do.
8. has played the Lotto only once.
9. has different colour eyes than you.
10. had a favourite subject at school that was the same as yours.

What this information gathering exercise (which, indeed, like all other CLT tasks, works on the basis of a good number of information gaps) does is to get learners to move around in class and find the answers, which they then record, and share with everyone afterwards. Teachers who try this exercise out will notice, however, that it generates a huge amount of discussion in the target language that is both natural and without stress.

What this kind of teaching intends, therefore, is to create a **supportive environment** in which learners are allowed to make mistakes. In fact, the learning theory that this kind of CLT subscribes to sees mistakes as signs of language development. The intention is to create a classroom unlike the conventional language classroom in which learners' language performance is perpetually on display, waiting to be evaluated by the teacher at every turn. The communicative teacher would accept that one cannot monitor the language being produced by everybody in a class, all the time.

Some teachers find this hard to accept. I have often encountered inexperienced teachers who try out role plays in class the first time by allowing learners to prepare, and then have them do it in pairs in front of the whole class. This is not how one **maximises learner talk**, and encourage as much language as possible to be produced. Rather, one would allow all

learners to enact their role plays at the same time (yes, it does generate a little more noise than usual, but one can re-assure the teacher next door that it is always — audibly — purposeful noise), perhaps going around and listening to a few attempts. Only afterwards, when the role play has been well rehearsed, may the learners be ready to be put on display. But if they are not ready, the psychological principles informing this direction within CLT would suggest that the teacher should not force them to.

The same goes for discussions and debates, and for the special case that we turn to in the next section.

Total physical response (TPR)

How the teacher minimises learners' stress is often critical for establishing a good language learning environment. Why would teachers want to do this? Shouldn't they actually wish to keep learners on the edge, so that they can perform better? Shouldn't they always be keeping a watchful eye on learners' language performance, evaluating it as much as possible?

It is evident that these arguments go back to behaviourist beliefs about language learning. Those teachers who work within the communicative tradition, however, generally believe differently. They would wish to eliminate stress because they believe that a supportive, caring environment encourages learners to take more risks. Such teachers may cite opinions in the theoretical literature that argue that the more risks learners take, the more likely they are to try out new forms of the target language,

and, having tried them out, make them part of their knowledge of the new language.

Good language learners, we therefore know today, are those who are willing to take risks. But of course, not all of us are natural **risk takers**. So the challenge for the teacher is to make learning possible for all learners by creating favourable conditions in the classroom. This means creating conditions that encourage risk taking, by reducing the risk of ridicule if one gets it wrong, and all the negative energy associated with anxiety, potential embarrassment, guilt and tension that accompany learning another language in a classroom setting.

The Total Physical Response (TPR) technique is designed exactly to achieve this. It is most often used for young learners of a second or third language, although it is equally suitable for adult beginners. The technique involves giving learners a series of instructions which do not require them to respond verbally, but merely to carry out a non-verbal action that indicates their **understanding**.

The following example is taken from a programme for second language beginners, called *Starting English* (Weideman & Rousseau 1996: 15). The activity begins where the teacher asks the young learners to sit down in a circle:

Come here and sit next to me, behind me, in front of me

... Ask your pupils to “sit down”, and gesture for everyone to sit down. Call one of the pupils: “Stephen, come here and sit next to me.” At the same time, use gestures to help him understand. Then call on other pupils, and give different instructions. These could be:

Come here and stand (sit) in front of me.

Come here and stand (sit) behind me.

Go there and stand in front of Max.

Go there and stand next to your friend (chair).

Like all other CLT activities, this kind of task is based on an information gap (the learners do not know who the teacher is going to call, nor what exactly the instruction will be). Yet it is **non-threatening**, since learners are not under pressure to perform verbally (and so make mistakes) in the new language. Nevertheless, they demonstrate their learning of the new language by successfully completing the required actions.

The basic problem for those designing the *Starting English* course was how to make the classroom a place in which language learning can take place. We often learn other languages successfully, but seldom do so in classrooms. So teachers have to try to bring **into** their classrooms the same emotional conditions in which language learning flourishes **outside** the classroom.

Though this is not an easy thing to do, the methods that are used in the *Starting English* course make an attempt to do just that. First, the course exposes learners to **comprehensible** English by requiring them to respond through their actions (i.e. non-verbally) to instructions that are given by the teacher. They learn because they get clues to what the instruction means from gestures and from the situation. But, especially at the beginning of the course, there is no pressure on them to speak individually.

The theory on which the TPR technique of instruction in another language relies, i.e. of learning a new language by carrying out actions, is called the **input hypothesis** of second language acquisition. This hypothesis says that learners should ideally be exposed to language just slightly beyond their understanding. This will stretch their ability, especially if it happens in a friendly environment.

In a course for (young or adult) beginners, it may therefore be a good idea if there is initially no pressure on the learners to speak the target language. In this way, teachers imitate in the classroom conditions that exist outside the classroom, for many learners report that when they learn a new language outside the classroom, they normally do not speak before they are ready. Only when we are satisfied that we can do it, do we venture to speak. Up to that time, very few demands should be made on learners to do this. The TPR technique makes this possible.

Stories, rhymes, songs and chants

Another way that learners can be sheltered from embarrassment at the beginning of their learning is by exposing them to stories. The teacher can either read a story, or prepare pictures and tell the story orally.

The problem is, of course, to find a **story** that is pitched just right for (i.e. slightly beyond!) the comprehension level of the class. In the *Starting English* young beginners' course (Weideman & Rousseau 1996), for example, comprehension is ensured by selecting stories that have lots of repetition. The repeated phrase makes the language more predictable, and, thus, comprehensible. In the story of the Greedy Goat, for example, some words are repeated throughout:

... The farmer looked at the washing line. "Where are my pants? Where is my shirt? Where is my hat? Where are my socks?" He looked at the goat.
"Did you eat my pants?"
"Bheee!" said the goat (nodding sheepishly).
"Did you eat my shirt?"
"Bheee!" said the goat (nodding sheepishly).
"Did you eat my hat?"
"Bheee!" said the goat ...

Learners are also sheltered from the teacher's evaluative attention when they do rhymes and songs. The following **rhyme**, for example, is used in conjunction with the TPR exercise discussed above (Weideman & Rousseau 1996: 17), and was suggested to the authors of the course for use by a teacher, Gail Ruiter:

This is my head

Ask your pupils to come and sit in front of you. Tell them they are going to learn a new rhyme ...

This is my head.
This is my nose.
These are my fingers.
These are my toes.
I nod with my head,
I smell with my nose.
I draw with my fingers,
I stand on my toes.

When learners do the rhyme, the teacher encourages them to point to each body part, or mime each action done with that part, as they say the rhymes.

There are many songs and rhymes that go well with teaching the names of parts of the body. A **song** that is a favourite among teachers in this respect is sung to the tune of "There is a tavern in the town":

Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
knees and toes.
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
knees and toes.
And eyes and ears and mouth and nose.
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
knees and toes.

In this song, the young learners are again encouraged to touch different parts of the body as they sing.

For older learners, there are wonderful jazz **chants** to create a stress-free learning environment. Chants sometimes allow learners to practice

vocabulary. This one, adapted from Carolyn Graham's *Jazz chants for Children* (1978: 71), introduces terminology associated with telling the time:

Fred Gets Up at Five O' Clock

Fred gets up at five o' clock,
his cat gets up at seven.
His dogs wake up at ten to six,
but his bird sleeps till eleven.

Here is another example of a jazz chant, taken from Carolyn Graham's *Small talk* (1986:63) that would help learners deal with telling the time, this time in a dialogue format. For this kind of chant, the teacher may divide the class into two groups of learners, with the one group chanting the questions, the other chanting the answers.

Is the Post Office Open Tomorrow?

Is the post office open tomorrow?
It's open from nine to five.
Is the post office open tomorrow?
It's open from nine to five.
What time does it open?
It opens at nine.
What time does it close?
It closes at five.
It opens at nine and closes at five.
It opens from nine to five.

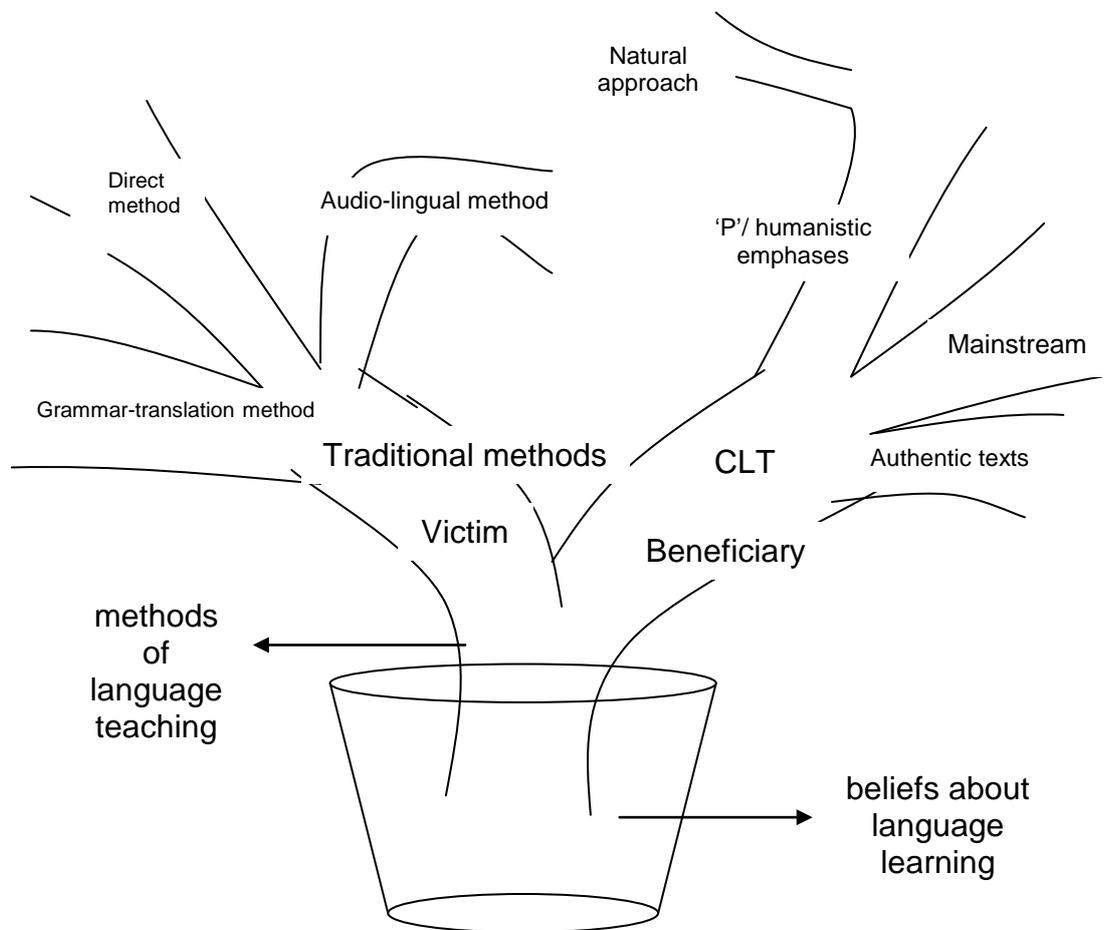
Are the shops open tomorrow?
They're open from nine to five.
Are the shops open tomorrow?
They're open from nine to five.
When do they open?
They open at nine.
When do they close?
They close at five.
Are the shops open tomorrow?
They open at nine.
They close at five.
They're open from nine to five.

The Natural approach

The methods and techniques discussed in this chapter are all concerned with lowering the anxiety of learners in the language classroom. Many of the techniques discussed above are brought together under the umbrella of the Natural approach. The **Natural approach** was developed by Terrell (cf. Terrell 1985; Krashen & Terrell 1983) in collaboration with Krashen, the person who devised the input hypothesis, and will be discussed further in the next chapter. The methods and techniques of this approach are widely known today, and they help teachers to make their classrooms places of joy and energy, free from embarrassment, fear and anxiety.

The concern of all of the methods and techniques discussed above is the emotional climate in which one learns another language. The contribution that this direction within CLT has made to our understanding of second and foreign language teaching is that it has compelled us to take the psychological dimensions of language learning into account, by suggesting that we learn better in a supportive, collaborative and non-threatening environment. The challenge this direction within CLT has posed to teachers is that of recreating inside the classroom the favourable conditions for second language learning that often exist outside of it.

The picture that we now have of the different language teaching methods now looks like this:



5 Eclecticism revisited

Eclecticism: the disadvantages

THIS DISCUSSION STARTED BY POINTING OUT THAT, WHEN teachers recovered from the ideologically compelling arguments of audio-lingualism — namely that it was a scientifically supported, ‘correct’ method — one can imagine that they may have wanted to avoid once again becoming victims of a method. This safer route for many involved adopting an **eclectic** attitude to language teaching.

The discussion has also suggested that one falls prey more easily to traditional methods. This is, perhaps, not strictly correct. Any method,

current or past, may assail us with compelling arguments and captivate us professionally, thus preventing us from considering alternatives. Yet the discussion has implied that the three different directions of the communicative approach to language teaching (Authentic texts; Mainstream or 'L' approaches; 'P' emphases) that we have looked at so far offer us a greater chance of becoming the **beneficiaries** of a certain approach to language teaching than any traditional approach. The debate and discussion that have accompanied CLT do not guarantee immunity from ideological entrapment, but certainly indicate a vigorous and continuing examination of the theoretical arguments being used to justify this approach.

Be that as it may, the eclectic attitude that teachers often adopt as a safe approach that will protect them from becoming victims of method, has several distinct disadvantages.

Firstly, if it is adopted as a safe strategy that immunises one against ideological undercurrents in language teaching methods, it cuts teachers off from the reconsideration of their professional practices. In a word, it discourages them to **reflect** upon their teaching. They have made up their minds, will use anything that 'works' to obtain results, and are safe from ideological excesses.

But is this such a safe approach?

Indeed, one must consider, secondly, that adopting an 'anything goes' position can have exactly the opposite result of playing it safe. Because one adopts a language teaching practice without much deliberation, one can just as easily fall victim to the methodological baggage that comes with it. For, thirdly, mixing all manner of methods and approaches may result in gathering in one's teaching arsenal such a mixed bag that all kinds of conflicts arise. Or, to use another analogy, a mixed brew may sometimes

be sweet to the taste, but it can just as easily upset one's stomach! Indeed, if there are **conflicting** approaches in one's instructional techniques, one may have contrary results to those one is striving for.

Take as an example simultaneously adopting both a behaviourist position (every error must be immediately corrected, lest it become a bad language habit), and the 'P' approach within CLT. The latter emphasises a supportive, non-threatening learning environment, one which is tolerant of mistakes. Clearly one cannot adhere to both positions at the same time. Or what about the Grammar-translation teacher wanting to teach partly through an approach that disallows translation altogether, such as the Direct method? What does the eclectic teacher do in such cases?

There is a fourth argument for me against an eclecticism that is not accompanied by **deliberate** choice, or not backed up by argument as well as by practical and theoretical justification. This is that teachers, when introduced to new methods and techniques, so quickly integrate into their traditional styles of teaching the new 'tricks' they are shown that they forget about the rationale for the techniques altogether. It is like cutting the technique off from its theoretical roots, which may have enriched it and allowed it to develop when used deliberately.

A fifth and final argument, related to the one just mentioned, is that if an innovative technique is used only occasionally, and mixed in with other (potentially contradictory) ones, the effect of the new is **diluted**.

It should have been clear from the discussion so far that there are all kinds of **continuities** among the different traditional and current methods considered. This means that there are already similarities and relationships between almost all methods. A good example of a similarity in technique, among traditional methods, is their use of fill-in-the-blank types of

exercises. Another example of a relationship across traditional methods and current ones is the affinity between the intention of the Direct method to expose learners directly to the target language, and the TPR technique of learning through actions. A third example of continuity between traditional and current approaches is the concern, in both the Audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching, with all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

The situation is even more opaque when one looks at textbooks. Some textbooks draw on a variety of potentially contradictory methods, apparently without any deliberation.

The result of the similarities and continuities that the methods already contain, including such eclectic mixes in textbooks, is almost always that the effect of the new is diluted. The question then is: what is the use of further diluting the potential effect of the innovation, if the innovation itself is already a compromise?

For, in spite of having similarities, all methods introduce something new. The effect of the innovation is reduced when we do not, as language teachers, take a method to its conclusion, or push it to its limits. Let me give one example. In the *Starting English* course for young beginners (Weideman & Rousseau 1996), from which several exercises illustrating techniques have been taken in the preceding discussion, the authors designed a number of the language teaching tasks by using methods that are essentially known as suitable for *adult* learning. Nonetheless, when adaptations of the technique known as the Silent Way and the method called Community Language Learning were deliberately tried out during the piloting phase of the materials, they worked exceptionally and surprisingly well with young learners.

The lesson from this is that, rather than diluting the new, we should push the method to its limits. Once we have familiarised ourselves with the justification for the new technique or method, the exciting possibility is that we can exploit its potential more fully, in ways that its original proposers did not initially consider.

All of the discussion so far suggests that there may also be arguments for adopting an eclectic approach. Indeed, if one can adopt a new method deliberately, maintain awareness of its original rationale, and remain wary of contradictions within one's chosen teaching style, one can at least steer clear of the main dangers associated with an eclectic approach.

Eclecticism: the positive side

The best argument for adopting an eclectic approach is probably that it has the potential of keeping the language teacher open to **alternatives**. In this way, it can even be seen as an antidote to becoming complacent about one's language teaching practices. Provided, therefore, that the teacher embraces a dynamic interpretation of eclecticism, i.e. actively seeks out new techniques, trying them out in their professional practice all the time, one may be able to justify eclecticism. One must add the further rider that new techniques must also be considered in terms of their underlying rationale.

These provisions are important, if an eclectic approach is not to become a mere excuse for either passively accepting anything that comes along, or making compromises with the traditional simply because it is the way of least resistance. A teacher trainer in another field — mathematics —

once remarked to me that she was always worried when teachers approached her after a workshop that introduced a new mathematics teaching method, with the comment that they had actually always been doing this. She therefore deliberately strove to make the technique as foreign as possible, so that no-one was tempted to say: “I’ve actually been doing this all along.”

There are other arguments for eclecticism too. When one looks at the history of language teaching, it is clear that some methods rely heavily on earlier ones. Or they attempt to improve upon them by seeking to strengthen their weak points. The case of the ALM, as a method that, while adding something new (a strongly behaviourist justification and associated techniques), is indeed a combination of the different emphases of two traditional methods, is an example. As we remarked in the earlier discussion, the ALM attempted to emphasise all four language skills, unlike the methods that had preceded it. In making this **combination**, the ALM is indeed an eclectic method.

Similarly, the Natural approach is seen by some as nothing more than an **extension** of the concerns of the Direct method, and could in that sense also be considered eclectic. Wherever one find continuities, an argument can be made for eclecticism: the one method carries forward the concerns of another. And since we can observe continuities everywhere, it is easy to make the argument that all methods are eclectic.

What one should note, in all such cases, are, of course, also the differences. The difference between the Natural approach and the Direct method is that the latter relied on a behaviourist justification, while the Natural approach strives for a language teaching design that takes into consideration a number of psychological factors concerning what a good

environment for language learning is. For this reason, the Natural approach delays oral production, through the use of techniques such as TPR, or listening to stories. In this respect it is the opposite of the Direct method.

As a consequence of this delay to introduce speaking in the target language early in the course, however, the Natural approach does then indeed become eclectic, allowing the subsequent introduction of information gap activities and a variety of other tasks that involve speaking. Indeed, in the *Starting English* course, we combined the pre-speech activities in the course with techniques, such as the Silent Way and Community Language Learning, that eventually compel learners to produce spoken English.

Similarly, there is the possibility of combining the ‘L’ and ‘P’ emphases in communicative teaching (cf. Roberts, 1982 and 1986). Some of these possibilities will be discussed in the next section, in a discussion of a way of language teaching that has, somehow, never gained enough prominence to exert a strong influence, but would qualify, within the framework adopted in this discussion, as a **fourth direction** within CLT. Why it has historically not had more influence is difficult to say, for this way of teaching, as we shall see below, carries the promise of combining not only the emotional and lingual emphases within CLT, but also suggests a way of combining the reading of literature — a traditional concern that has endured in spite of the introduction of communicative and quasi-communicative syllabi — with the teaching of a target language.

The acquisition of transactional competence

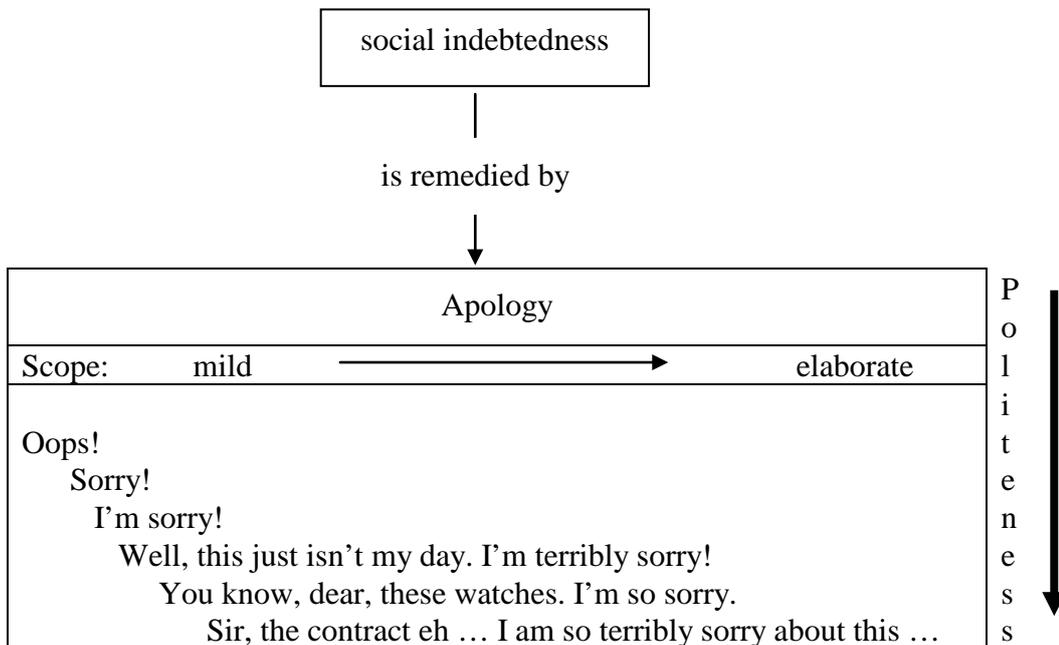
To understand fully the last direction within communicative teaching to be discussed here we must first consider one of the major problems encountered in mainstream communicative teaching. One of the founding principles of this kind of language teaching is the conscious reaction against teaching language as so many odd bits of (discrete) grammatical structures. The immediate problem is that language functions may also be discretely labelled, used and taught (cf. in this regard Wilkins, 1976, and the taxonomy given there). In communicative teaching we therefore had a new perspective on language, but at the same time, and contrary to the initial intention, the teacher had very little but the old method (of teaching language in discrete bits) to fall back on. All that happened in many cases was that the teaching of discrete parts of grammar was exchanged for the teaching of discrete functions of language.

A partial solution was soon discovered: functions could be taught as parts of interactions between participants at talk. So, apart from acknowledging the functional nature of language, a dimension of **interaction** could also be recognised. This was entirely in keeping with the original intentions of those who initially supported the idea of communicative language teaching. Lingual interaction presupposes that the participants have (more or less durable) roles in their talk, and the assumption of a specific role (of tourist, official, waiter, etc.) by the student was in any case already part of the instructional process in the mainstream

of communicative teaching. Moreover, the acknowledgement of an interactional dimension brings with it not only the recognition of (subjective) roles, but also gives more insight into (objective) lingual units that are larger than the sentence. In short, we have here a recognition that language functions do not occur in isolation, but in interaction pairs or sequences. In this way the speech act or function of ‘apologising’ may be taken up into the larger unit of an apology/accept or apology/reject interaction pair, or an offer may be followed by an act of acceptance or refusal in an offer/accept (refuse) pair, a question by an answer, and so forth.

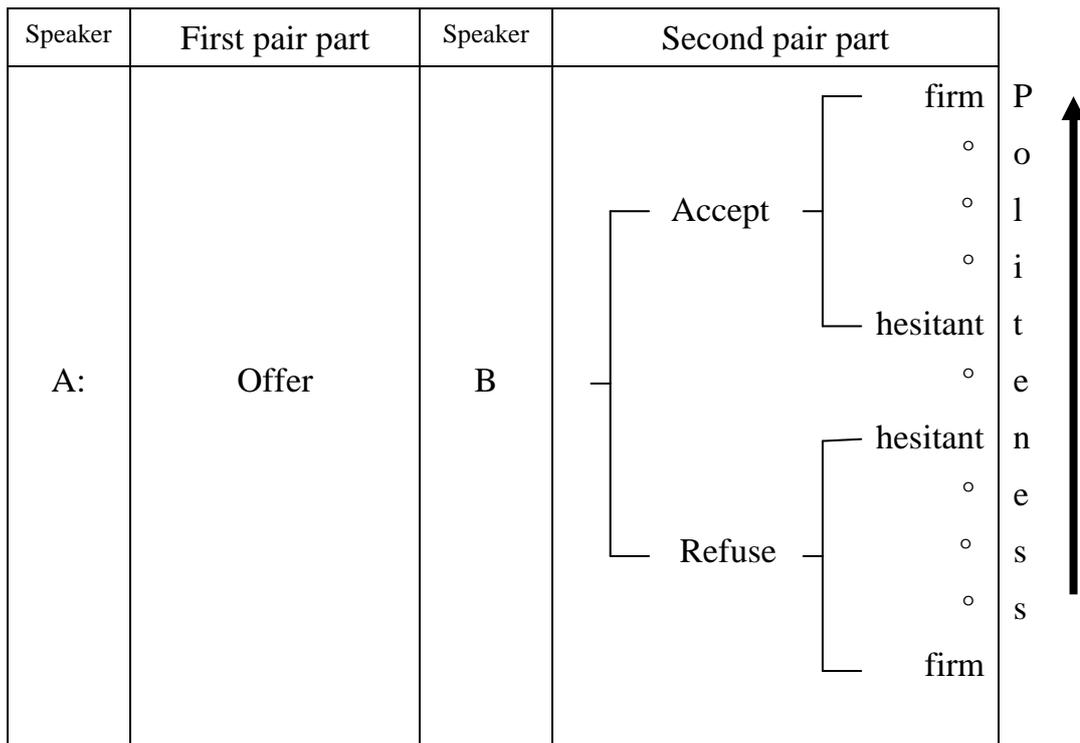
The remaining problem for the learner of a second or foreign language, however, is that there are various kinds of apology/accept (reject) utterances. How does the learner know when to say “Oops!” instead of “Sorry!” or “I’m terribly sorry”? How does the learner know when the more elaborate apology is appropriate, and not a milder form? This conscious decision that language users have to take is made much easier when one considers that the function of apologies is to remedy the social debt incurred in human social interaction.

In cases where apologies are offered as remedies for social debts, the debtor must, in a moment of reflection, decide what kind of apology (from mild to elaborate) would be the **strategically** correct choice to repay the debt incurred. If the inappropriate apology is chosen, it misses its goal, and the debtor may appear to be grossly impolite. The following diagram represents this problem and its possible successful solution:



In such cases one has, in other words, apart from recognising a communicative (interactional) dimension to language, added another: the **transactional**. This dimension is prominent particularly in the work of Di Pietro in language teaching (for a survey of work that is otherwise difficult to come by, cf. Roberts, 1986). The successful acquisition of transactional competence by the non-native speaker of a language entails the ability not only to use language functions correctly, but to know also that there are strategic considerations and criteria which apply to determine the appropriate grammatical realisations of those functions. By adding a **strategic** edge to language use, we have therefore acknowledged, in the teaching of second or foreign languages, that language is not merely used, but that it is used with specific aims in mind in our interaction with other people.

Although we still need much research on the socio-cultural and socio-emotional determinants of lingual strategies before we may actually be able to teach transactional competence, these insights have, nonetheless, brought about a measure of reevaluation of roles and role-play exercises in communicative teaching. We know, for example, that the student of a second or foreign language must learn how to take the strategically correct decision in making, accepting or refusing an offer. If this is not learnt, the lingual **transaction** may be unsuccessful. Thus a student will have to learn (see the figure below) that in certain languages a hesitant acceptance could be interpreted, according to the specific socio-cultural norms operative in those languages, as refusal; or, conversely, that a hesitant refusal should, for reasons of politeness, rather be interpreted as acceptance:



A Bengali girl may, for example, for socio-cultural reasons firmly refuse the offer of a cup of tea (at least twice), since in her culture it would be impolite for her to appear to be accepting too eagerly. Imagine the difficulties of such a young lady in a British situation: not only must she learn to speak the foreign language, but she must also learn to make the strategically correct choices in her interaction with mother-tongue speakers. Those teachers who have taught immigrants will have many similar tales to relate of the woes and mishaps of their students (perhaps involving things much more crucial than a cup of tea) in their lingual transactions with speakers of the target language.

In the use of almost every function of the language there are strategic decisions to be taken, also among mother-tongue speakers. Another good example we have of these choices is the politeness scale (Figure 3) in the giving of (spoken or written) instructions:

Functions	Tone	
Commands and instructions (realised by imperatives, etc.)	brusque	P
	severe	o
	neutral	l
	impatient	i
	familiar	t
	inviting	e
Requests		n
Advice		e
Suggestions		s
		s



This means that it is more polite to request something (“Could you please hold this for a second?”) than to instruct someone to do it in a neutral tone of voice (“Hold this for a second”). Or that it is more polite to suggest something (“I wonder if you could possibly be so kind as to hold this down for me for a bit?”) than giving a formal instruction (“You will report for duty at 18:00”), which may be quite severe in tone. And that being familiar in tone (“Off you go!” said to a child sitting on one’s lap) is more polite than the impatient “Out!”

The problem for second language learners, again, is making the correct selection of language function.

Research has shown that there are some complex issues involved here: the more direct the request (even when given in a neutral tone of voice), the bigger the chances are that the hearer may interpret it as being impolite. On the other hand, more indirect instructions (as in advice or suggestions), although more polite, are at the same time less effective. The lingual strategy whereby the appropriate one is selected is therefore always important: else the instruction/request fails, or (especially when addressed to superiors) is remembered accurately! The transactional norm that speakers of any language must learn to handle is that the costs and benefits of **politeness** and **effectiveness** must be balanced in using the language (Kemper & Thissen, 1981).

Let us look at an example of a possible exercise in the teaching of transactional competence (Weideman, 1985: 20) that employs what I call the think: mutter and utter technique:

Could I see you for a minute?

Peter Smith wants to speak to his employer about his long-promised pay-rise. What they think (in brackets (...)) and what they say when they meet each other in the passage are sometimes quite different:

Peter: (I wonder if I shouldn't ask to see him now?) Excuse me, could I see you for a minute, please?

Mr Jones: (Oh no! It's Smith. He's bound to ask about his pay-rise; I must try to put him off - I'm simply too busy now) Well, .. eh ... y..e..s, OK, but I only have a few minutes to spare, I ... eh ..

Peter: (He knows I'm going to ask him about my pay; perhaps it will be better not to press him now) Perhaps it would be best to see you later then...

Mr Jones: (Phew! What a relief!) Sure/All right/Fine.

Peter: (Better get back to the office now) Thanks.

Mr Jones: 'Bye.

Try this dialogue with a friend, then script another three dialogues in which Peter Smith, instead of thinking 'perhaps it will be better not to press him now' and backing off,

(a) tries either

(i) successfully or

(ii) unsuccessfully to arrange for another time

or

(b) decides to press ahead

Include in the scripts what the two characters are thinking, then practise the dialogues together.

Students are instructed here to mutter the thoughts (in brackets) and utter the words actually spoken. Their mutterings help to show up the strategic considerations, their utterings the actual realisations of these choices.

In this direction in communicative language teaching, the ongoing process of verbal **negotiation**, as in the playing of co-operative board

games,⁴ is again of the utmost importance, because the aim is to teach the student how to employ language for the sake of handling situations and to accomplish goals.

A further important advantage of this fourth kind of communicative teaching (or the Strategic interaction method, as it is sometimes referred to) is that the learner is given the time (sometimes only a moment or so, as in lingual transactions occurring outside the confines of the classroom) to consider what course of action to take. There are various possibilities of exercises where learners are allowed first to practise and **rehearse** — as many of us do in real life when we stand still for a moment and think of what we should say before entering a room or an office. Planning and exercise normally bring about a more relaxed learner.

Another advantage is that the teaching of language and literature can more easily be integrated in this kind of teaching, by, for example, allowing students to **dramatise** episodes in books they have read after devising strategic paths different from those given in the original text.

A serious (possibly temporary) drawback in teaching strategic lingual interaction is the scarcity of materials available for beginners. With a little ingenuity, however, the teacher can, in the simplest of lingual episodes (even in those with the minimum of an information gap, such as the beginnings of telephone conversations) modify existing language exercises for this purpose. In these exercises, in addition to an information gap, normal communication is also **short-circuited**, and the interaction therefore has to be strategically managed by re-negotiating meaning. Compare the

⁴ These are games that are non-competitive, requiring every one of the players to work together to succeed/win, and they are excellent materials for advanced second language

following exercise of the beginning of a telephone conversation between a boy and a girl (translated from van Jaarsveld & Weideman, 1985):

(Telephone rings)

Brian: Hello?

Annette: Hallo, Brian!

Brian: I .. eh ... hello ..?

Annette: You forget quite quickly! It's me, Annette!

Brian: Sorry, Annette. For a moment I did not recognise your voice ...

Students must learn here how to apologize/devise excuses for not recognising the caller's voice (as one secretary recently claimed upon not recognising mine: "Sorry! My earring was in the way"!). After doing this, there are further possibilities to explore: what do we do when we come up face to face with a person, and cannot remember his/her name? How do we explain our actions to the caller when we have to answer the telephone at a friend's home, and the caller does not recognise our voice? How does one apologize, in writing, for forgetting a distant friend's birthday?

One disadvantage of the Strategic interaction method is the somewhat unrealistic roles that proponents of this teaching technique sometimes require learners to adopt. The simplest solution to this problem is avoidance: with so many realistic language exercises available today, language teachers simply do not have to require of their learners, for example, to play the role of a dead miner's wife so as to express their grief in a foreign language. There are enough other, more realistic roles available for them to have to learn to adopt.

The Strategic interaction method, though not as influential as mainstream CLT or the 'P' direction within communicative teaching,

teaching classes.

nevertheless has the potential of bringing together the main emphases of these two. It constitutes an important example of considered eclecticism, and, in an environment where the teaching of literature still forms part of the language teaching syllabus, it provides a good alternative to traditional teaching.

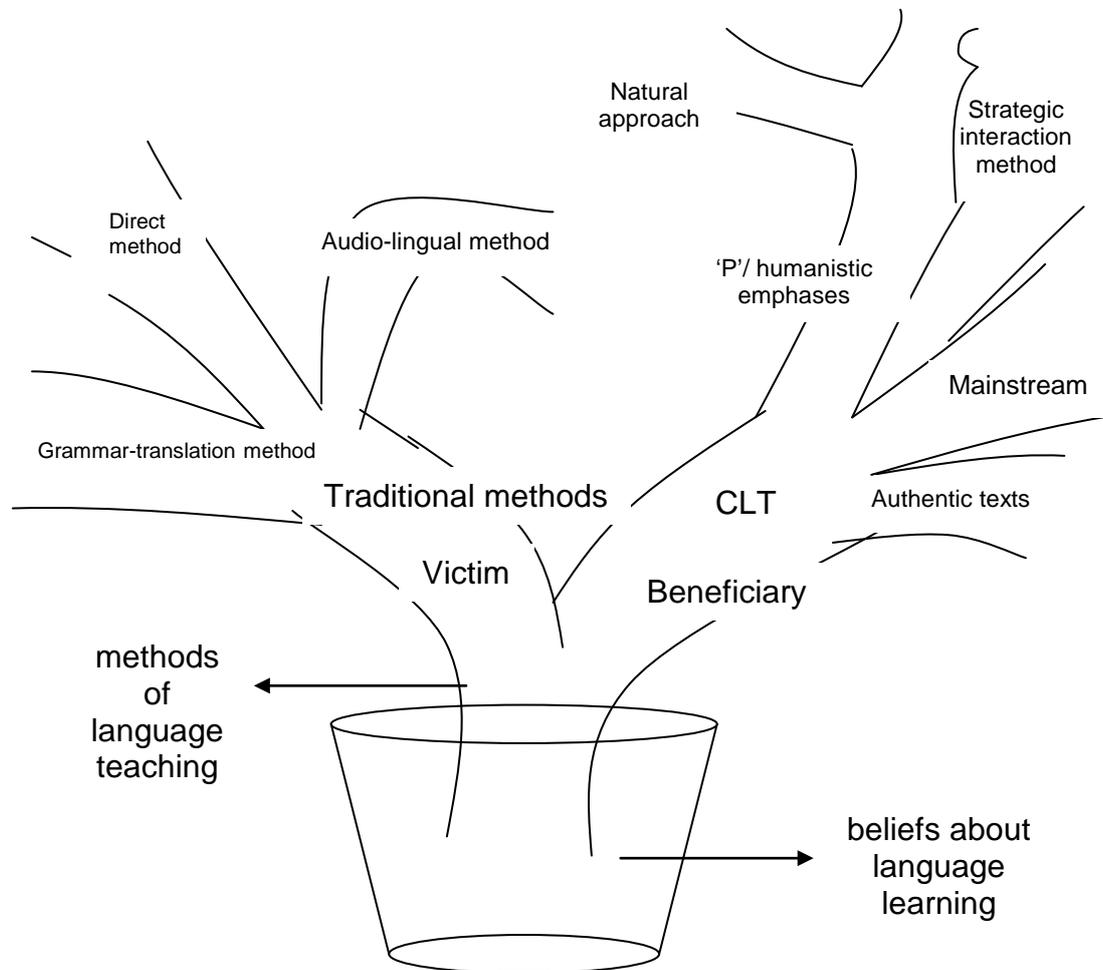
We should note, however, that the combination achieved in the Strategic interaction method is a practical rather than a philosophical or theoretical one. It is, in fact, difficult to conceive of the ‘L’ and ‘P’ emphases within communicative language teaching being philosophically reconciled as easily as this. The reason is that these represent two opposing directions within Western academic tradition.

What complicates a synthesis on the theoretical level is that the ‘P’ approaches represent a freedom-seeking direction in Western thought that is the exact opposite of the ideals of the other, which are to control everything through science and technology. Indeed, mainstream CLT, the ‘L’ emphasis, has been criticised for a technocratic approach to determining learners’ language needs that derives from the same roots as the ALM, the tradition it replaced.

In the practice of the language classroom, however, matters may look somewhat different. Here, distilled to the essentials, the practical wisdom of the ‘L’ approach, namely that language is more than form, and the truth emphasised by the ‘P’ approaches (that language learning must be accompanied by as little fear, anxiety and stress as possible), may indeed both be accommodated in language teaching.

On the tree figure that we have been using to illustrate the various language teaching methods (see the end of Chapter 4, above), the Strategic interaction method therefore probably fits in on a branch somewhere

between the mainstream and 'P' directions within CLT, touching parts of both of these.



The combination of different emphases within CLT in the method discussed here brings to a preliminary close our discussion of the pros and cons of an eclectic approach. On the one hand, if one can employ a number of methods deliberately to achieve language teaching and learning goals, such an approach may yield a professionally stimulating experience. But if, on the other hand, one uses an eclectic argument merely for the sake of avoiding commitment and playing it safe, never coming to an understanding

of the roots of the techniques that one adopts, the only effect it may have is to dilute the effect of the new.

There are, of course, other possible combinations of language teaching methods. In the next chapter, an example of a consciously adopted combination of approaches is considered.

6 Alternative combinations

Giving learners a say

THE SYNTHESIS OF VARIOUS DIRECTIONS WITHIN CLT MAY NOT BE enough to satisfy all language teachers professionally. Especially for those who would like to explore the limits of their professional ability as language teachers, a number of alternatives exist. Considering these alternatives takes them a step further, professionally, in that they are confronted with conscious choices that significantly influence the design of the courses they teach.

As we have pointed out before, these so-called humanistic (or alternative) methods of language teaching, such as the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, and Community Language Learning, share with the ‘P’ direction within communicative language teaching an emphasis on the **emotional** aspects of language learning. In these methods, the focus is on the ‘whole’ learner, and on what the learners themselves bring to the learning environment in respect of prior knowledge, experience and a consciousness of their own language needs.

One of these methods, and the various combinations that are possible within it, is considered here. Its outstanding feature is that it gives learners the opportunity to have a say in formulating their **own curriculum**, not merely before the course, in the form of a formal needs analysis, but during the very process of learning. In fact, learners can decide from one dialogue episode to the next, even from one utterance to the next, what (new) direction their own learning can take.

A Community Language Learning (CLL) experience

Community Language Learning (CLL) is a specific kind of language teaching that must not be confused with Communicative language teaching (CLT). The term ‘community’ here refers to the group of learners assembled to learn another language, and how they bring to the language learning class all manner of experience and knowledge, which is then put to use, through the mediation of a facilitating professional (the teacher), for the benefit of everyone in the class (the ‘community’).

My own experience⁵ of using this way of teaching comes from an environment in which the staff of an organisation expressed the intention, amongst themselves, to learn Southern Sotho (Sesotho), the majority language within their area of work. The organisation was the Urban Foundation, an NGO which ran a number of education and housing projects from the provincial office to which I was attached at the time.

It was clear that we had to try out a methodology that was different from the conventional. Given the professional independence of the learners, we had to select a format for an adult learning situation that we knew would be clearly different from traditional language instruction. In order to ensure the continued commitment of participants in a venture of this nature, it goes without saying that it is important to use language teaching techniques that meet with the approval of those involved.

An additional complication was that half of the staff either spoke Sesotho fluently, or at least had some knowledge of the language. However, since (a) there was not a clearly identifiable tutor in this group, and (b) we did not want to exclude any member of staff, it was decided to allow all personnel to participate, and to find ways of using everybody's talents as we went along.

It should be noted that this is one important way in which this language learning experience is different from all the other examples referred to so far, which mostly involve pre-designed language learning materials for beginners, intermediate level or even advanced learners. The design of this course happened as a result of inputs made by all involved.

⁵. This part of the chapter is based on the story of this experience, which I related in Weideman 1990.

In this case, the learners felt that they were determining their own syllabus as they progressed. They were, therefore, in **control** of how their language needs were being met. In other approaches, such as mainstream CLT, learners' needs are anticipated beforehand in the form of a needs analysis. At the same time, since the 'community' of learners involved in this experience worked together as a team to achieve the common goal of development, we decided to use techniques suitable for *co-operative* (instead of competitive) learning environments. This would also have the effect of limiting the anxiety and stress that usually accompany learning another language.

The decision to approach learning co-operatively pointed more than anything else to employing Community Language Learning or CLL (cf. Richards and Rodgers 1986: 113 ff.; Larsen-Freeman 1986: 89 ff.).

When one uses this approach, learners sit in a circle, and construct a **dialogue** with the help of a facilitator. The facilitator moves around the outside of the circle. A learner requests the translation of the contribution she wants to make to the dialogue being constructed. The facilitator then whispers a translation into the ear of the learner. In the group where this CLL experience took place, there were several fluent Sesotho speakers available, which meant that whispered translations were readily available.

After the translation has been given, the learner can check with the facilitator whether she has the right utterance. Normally, there are several such checking exchanges between learner and facilitator that are overheard by other participants. When the learner is satisfied that she can say the translation herself, and the facilitator considers the pronunciation adequate, the learner is ready to **record** her speaking turn on a tape recorder.

In the experience being described here, we used an ordinary cassette tape recorder with a built-in condenser microphone. Once the speaking turn has been recorded, the facilitator may give a (silent) indication to learners that the lesson can proceed, perhaps by nodding her head to invite further contributions to the dialogue.

As in the Silent Way, one could also use another technique of eliciting a conversation. I have in these kinds of classes made use of multi-coloured cuisenaire rods to invite contributions to the dialogue, by silently inviting learners first to name the two characters represented by the two differently coloured sticks, and then to proceed to encourage them silently to make up a dialogue between these two.

As soon as the first turn at talk has been recorded successfully (and the 'pause' button on the recorder pressed down once again), another learner may therefore indicate a desire to voice a contribution to the dialogue. She would most probably do so by first saying it in her first language, and then request a **translation** into the target language. The same procedure as before is followed: the learner works with the facilitator until they are satisfied with the result, which is again recorded.

In this way, a complete dialogue, consisting of one or more verbal exchanges, is systematically built up and recorded turn by turn.

When complete, the recorded dialogue is repeated three times. The intention is to listen to the new sounds the first time, then to give the first language equivalents (orally), and finally to write up the conversation by **transcribing** it turn by turn. This is followed by a written translation of the dialogue into the first language, starting first with the familiar items and

proceeding with those that again require the knowledge of the facilitator has of the target language.

A typical dialogue would look like this:

Joe: Dumela, Esther
Esther: Dumela, Joe
Joe: O phela jwang, mme?
Esther: Ke sa phela, ha ho molato, ntate. Wena o phela jwang?
Joe: Ke sa phela, ke a leboha. O tswa kae?
Esther: Motsebetsing.
Joe: Tsamaya hantle.
Esther: Tsamaya hantle le wena.

As is normal in this kind of dialogue, the initial greetings (“Dumela”) are followed by “How are you?” exchanges (“O phela jwang”), until Joe answers: “I am well, thank you” (“Ke sa phela, ke a leboha”), and follows this up by asking: “Where are you coming from?” Esther replies: “From work” (“Motsebetsing”), before they take leave of each other (“Go well. You too”).

Here is another example of such a dialogue that I have constructed as an example of CLL methodology with the aid of a speaker of a minority Namibian language, Thimbukushu. The fairly direct translation helps one to see the meanings of different words and phrases more clearly:

[A: Woman; B: Man]

A: Moro mushere wange.	Hallo, friend of mine.
B: Moro mukanyokwetu.	Hallo, good lady.
Thiwana ndi?	Well are you?

A: Thiwana ni di, matumero. Owe ne ngepi?	Well am I, thanks. You are how?
B: Name thiwana vene. Na tumera	And I well also. I thank you
A: Mukarepo thiwana.	You stay well.
B: Muyendepo thiwana	You go well.

After the dialogue has been transcribed and translated, one usually leaves room for some **practice**, before (or sometimes after) allowing time for questions and a period of silence.

The framework of the lesson up to this stage therefore looks like this:

1. Record dialogue turn by turn
2. Repeat recorded dialogue three times
 - Listen
 - Give first language equivalent (orally)
 - Transcribe conversation
3. Translate dialogue, starting with familiar items
4. Practise it
5. Questions
 - Learner-learner
 - Learner-teacher
 - Silence

It is clear that the focus is on learning the language by taking turns at talk, and not on grammar. However, given the way that the adults participating in the course had learned (and were taught) other languages before, there was some expectation on their part for grammar instruction.

The period where **questions** could be asked, first among learners and then between learners and the teacher, provided the opportunity for points of grammar to be clarified. Some learners, for example, may have wanted confirmation of a morphological regularity that they had noticed in the formation of the plural (e.g. that one says “Dumelang” when greeting more than one person, in contrast to “Dumela” when greeting an individual). Other learners wanted to relate their past or existing incomplete knowledge of Sesotho to something they had noticed in the language material being dealt with.

The period of **silence** is a time of reflection for each individual learner. It is designed to make space for what we so often do not have the opportunity in a conventional language learning situation: asking ourselves important questions such as “What have I learned?”; “How can I remember this phrase?”; “What can I do to practice this afterwards?” — the intention of which is to give time for consolidating our learning, making a conscious effort to remember worthwhile expressions, and setting up things that will aid our recall of the new language.

To stretch the ability of the learners still further, a lesson can be concluded with a rapid **narrative** by an expert. For example, after a session that involved vocabulary dealing with a house, the facilitator might tell the story of The Three Pigs. This combines the CLL experience with elements of the so-called ‘Listening’ or ‘Comprehension’ methods like TPR. The benefit of this particular example was that the learners, once they had discovered what story was being told, could hear very distinctly the Sesotho word for “huff and puff”! Since any such narrative is always pitched somewhat beyond the present capacity of the learners, it is a useful learning device. It becomes a gratifying experience for the learners to be able to

follow a narrative as a whole, even though they may not understand every word they hear.

Finally, if time allows, the expert may engage in **conversation** with individual learners. In this case, however, the facilitator takes care to use only vocabulary and material dealt with before, and already known to learners.

The belief that this approach has about language learning is that learners are well aware of their own language needs, and, if they are allowed to take the lead in this, they will be able to meet their own needs. They are competent language learning agents in their own right; if the method of teaching respects this, it is a powerfully motivating experience.

Further combinations

The experience of learners in the case referred to in the previous section was, however, not that it was always as strongly motivating as the CLL literature would suggest. Though they thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated having full **control** of their own learning, some felt that, after the first five lessons, their progress was too slow. It could hardly have been otherwise, since the hour-long lessons took place only once a week. Nonetheless, in keeping with the philosophy of CLL, namely that learners should be able to direct their own learning, it was decided to do some Total Physical Response (TPR) work in order to maintain everyone's interest, before switching back to CLL dialogue building.

This proved to be a happy combination of methods. The TPR sessions were effective for **vocabulary** acquisition. Using cuisenaire rods again, learners discovered the names of colours, how to count first from one to five, and then beyond (each rod represents a number between 1 and 10), and even how to do sums, all through instructions given in the target language. In the same way the different parts of the house, the names of its inhabitants and the furniture they use, were dealt with.

The CLL work done in the first five lessons of the course was crucial for establishing interactional skills in the context of a conversation in the target language. Compared to this, the strength of the TPR activities lay in facilitating the acquisition of vocabulary. As a result, after about ten lessons, the learners knew and could use about one hundred words.

There was a further positive result. When participants became comfortable with the instructions given to them during TPR sessions by native speakers of Sesotho, the activities were often converted into **information gap** exercises. In these types of task, typical of all kinds of CLT, learners could demonstrate verbally their own ability to convey information to others, even if it were only in the form of a simple instruction (“Joe, take the red rod and give it to me”).

In addition, the group decided that it would be a good idea to introduce **songs** into each session. The fact that some of the staff were involved in pre-school education shows up in the choice of songs: we had one about an elephant, a lizard and a mouse, and another about a butterfly.

Using TPR to build vocabulary proved to be a good launching pad for further dialogue construction. Simulating a situation where a delivery

man arrives at the house of Mrs Wolff to deliver a TV set that she had bought, participants came up with the following dialogue:

- Patrick: Dumela, mme Wolff (*Good day, Mrs Wolff*).
- Mrs Wolff: Dumela, ntate (*Good day, sir*).
- Patrick: Nna ke tswa Furniture City (*I am from Furniture City*).
- Mrs Wolff: Nka ho thusa? (*How can I be of assistance?*)
- Patrick: Ke tlisitse TV (*I have brought the TV*).
- Mrs Wolff: E kenye ka kamoreng ya ho dula, ka kopo (*You can put it down in the lounge for me, please*).

An exercise like this could now lead from a simple dialogue exercise to further **role play** activity, something that we were prevented from doing at the outset because we were attempting to maintain a non-threatening learning environment.

So?

All of this illustrates that there are several combinations of methods possible when one takes CLL as the foundation of one's teaching. What is new in CLL is the degree of control exercised by learners. What is conventional is the range of methods and techniques that can be integrated into this starting point: Silent Way (eliciting the dialogue with stick people), TPR, information gap tasks, songs and rhymes, role plays.

CLL is not the only method that allows such combination. The technologically more sophisticated method known as Suggestopedia, which makes elaborate use of different types of music, divides the lesson into four

concerts. In one concert listening activities occupy the learners, in the last concert typical CLT (such as information gap tasks) may be done.

These combinations are possible because there appear to be no serious contradictions between the learning theories on which the various methods are built. CLL gives full control to the learner, respecting **individuality** and choice. The Silent Way emphasises that learners have inner resources of their own, and do themselves and their inherent competence to learn another language an injustice if they rely heavily on the ‘expert’ knowledge of another (the teacher). Thus, in the Silent Way, the slogan is that the teacher works with the learners, but it must remain the learners themselves who work with the language (many conventional teachers would do themselves and their learners a huge favour if they simply applied this!). The silence of the teacher stresses the **individual responsibility** each learner has for his or her own learning, something that traditional teaching all too easily forgets. Suggestopedia also promotes tapping the vast **inner resources** that learners themselves bring to the learning of another language, and has techniques for allowing these resources to emerge.

All of these are methodological points that emerge from fairly similar beliefs about language learning, which explains the kind of considered, deliberate eclecticism that is possible amongst them. The point, however, remains one of design: when one designs language instruction, it is always a deliberate action. If it is not, it is unprofessional.

In the next chapter, to conclude the discussion, we look at various considerations one takes into account when designing language teaching.

7 Design considerations in language teaching

Requirements for a communicative approach

IT SHOULD BE CLEAR FROM THE PRECEDING DISCUSSION THAT language teaching is very demanding, professionally. It calls for clear choices on the part of the teacher, and it demands a consistency in approach if one is to benefit professionally from the alternatives available. The argument has been that to teach with consistency, one needs to make a certain commitment, and not be swayed merely by fashion and ideology.

This does not mean that one's teaching must not change. Indeed, one must remain open to alternatives, strengthening one's teaching with new methods and techniques that one encounters, which are in tune with one's

beliefs about language learning. One may even change one's beliefs about how languages are learned in the classroom, but then the challenge is to develop professionally a new style of teaching that is aligned with one's convictions about learning. Attaining such an integrity of approach is what the professional language teacher strives for.

Most teachers today would profess to be communicative in their approach. If they are to be consistent, what are the requirements for them to fulfil in this kind of language teaching?

In the first instance, there are, as we have noted above, numerous **new techniques** that the language teacher will have to be able to use before we can be said to have mastered the art of communicative language teaching in mass-learning settings. The most important of these techniques probably is the information gap technique, but there are many others, such as role plays, games and discussions, that incorporate this foundation.

Secondly, there are certain things we can learn from each of the four directions in communicative language teaching discussed above.

If we consider the first direction within communicative teaching discussed above, we note the great importance that is attached to realism. This is the reason why this direction uses authentic texts. It means, therefore, that language teaching must be related as closely as possible to real language use, as well as to the present and prospective needs of the student (this is also very important in mainstream communicative teaching). Language in the classroom must always have at least a spark of **authenticity** and actuality, because it must be aimed at a goal that lies outside the classroom. Language teaching which exists only for the sake of

language teaching is an idol that must eventually perish since, like all idols, it feeds upon itself.

A third criterion, one that we can derive from mainstream CLT, is the following: in a general communicative language course, in other words in one which has not been designed to cater only for specific needs and purposes, no language medium or **skill** should, without good reason, receive preferred treatment over any other. Reading is just as important as writing, speaking or listening in our lingual communication with others, and vice versa.

Indeed, there is a rather widespread misconception among teachers today that the communicative approach is merely some kind of perfected ‘oral approach’. It is not, and the reason why it is not is that communication occurs also in media other than the spoken medium. It is understandable that teachers, after trying for decades to ‘get the students to speak’ the language, would easily misunderstand the point of the approach in this respect. But just as all those years of trying to get students to speak have not necessarily been in vain, it is equally true that all the centuries of intensive study of the written word, as well as the literate state of modern First World culture and the enormous amount of time spent on writing, listening and reading skills in foreign and second language teaching, should now be summarily dismissed as inappropriate.

Fourth: we have, in communicative teaching, at long last and with what seems to be an enormous amount of persuasion and argumentative energy, achieved in language teaching a **broader perspective** on language and its various uses than we have ever had. It would be a great pity if linguists, applied linguists and language teachers allowed this opportunity to

slip through their fingers by reverting to the old ways. There is a tremendous responsibility for developing language teaching in a meaningful way that language teachers will have to shoulder.

Fifth, the ‘L’ as well as the ‘P’ directions within CLT alert us to learners’ **needs**. These needs are both functional language needs and the emotional needs of learners. In respect of the latter, the alternative approaches also challenge us to design our language teaching in such a way that learners have a greater say in determining their own curriculum, and so controlling how their needs are satisfied.

Finally, we can learn from the ‘P’ emphases in CLT that the atmosphere in which language learning takes place is critical. It is telling that, for many who become wholly fluent in another language, this is achieved outside the classroom. We must try to replicate in the classroom those conditions that make language learning successful in environments outside of it. In the next section, we look at a design instrument that can help us achieve this.

A stress index for language methods

To become a professional, every language teacher should be able, eventually, to design their own teaching and learning materials. In designing language teaching materials, one would probably start with a broad set of principles, such as that described in the previous section. But there are also other, more specific criteria that could help one to articulate the rationale for a course.

One such instrument that I have used is a **stress index** for language teaching methods. It is inspired by a similar kind of matrix by Lightbown and Spada (1993: 71) that compares ‘natural’ acquisition outside the classroom with traditional and communicative teaching, but was developed from a slightly different angle to highlight the way that different methods reduce or generate stress, anxiety and tension in the language classroom.

Let us take, for example, the design of a course for beginners. Would there be any justification for any of the techniques and methods normally used in such courses, such as songs and rhymes, for example? Is there any use for story-telling? And what rationale is there for using other techniques, such as TPR, or even the Silent Way, where the teacher is completely, or almost completely, silent?

The stress index measures the degree of anxiety or stress generated by different techniques in terms of four parameters: the obligation on the learner to perform, whether the technique requires a verbal response from the learner, whether the language performance of the individual is public, i.e. done in front of others, and the teacher’s ability to evaluate the individual.

The stress index assumes that the problem for (young) learners is that they may be unwilling to take risks. This is deemed to be bad for language learning, since risk-takers make better language learners. Of course, this is also the case with older learners, and even more so with adults, especially where cultural norms may prohibit risk taking, i.e. prevent them from losing face in front of others.

The problem is that all learners are not risk-takers. The solution therefore is to create an environment in which it is acceptable to take risks,

one in which the possible loss of face is not the end of the world. The elimination of stress would create such an environment. How would one rate the different methods and techniques in the four stress-generating categories? We mark the different blocks in each column with a plus [+] for the feature being present or with a minus [-] if the feature is absent. The completed matrix is on one of the following pages, so don't proceed until you have taken the opportunity to complete it yourself.

Comparison: different methods for beginners

	Individual learner wants to perform	Verbal response required	Individual performance is public	Teacher can evaluate individual
Stories				
Songs & rhymes				
TPR				
Warm-up exercises				
Information gap				
Silent Way				

Let's assume that, when the teacher tells the class a story, this is normally a whole class activity, and that there is no or very little pressure on individual learners to perform. Except when, subsequent to the telling of the story, the teacher may ask individual learners questions about the narrative, so testing their knowledge, there is no reason to think that individual

learners feel any tension or anxiety. In the first column, next to 'Stories', one may therefore enter a '-' sign. It does not generate stress.

How does story-telling fare in terms of the other criteria? It requires no verbal response from the learner (the teacher is telling the story to the whole class), and therefore we can again enter a '-' in this column. Since there is no individual performance, and the performance is not public, we enter a third minus. As regards the fourth criterion, the teacher can perhaps evaluate the individual afterwards, but, since the intention of telling a story is certainly not to test the individual, but to expose everyone to the new language, we can reasonably enter a minus here as well.

It appears, therefore, as if story-telling is a very suitable technique to use for beginners. In terms of four criteria, it hardly generates any stress.

How does the second technique, the singing of songs or the chanting of rhymes, fare? Certainly, individual learners may want to perform, but, since this is a whole class activity, their performance is not public. Also, the learner is shielded from the evaluation of the teacher by virtue of these being whole class activities, so here too one would enter a minus. The only potential stress generating activity would be that the learner is indeed required to make a verbal response (though in a group). So this technique scores at most two pluses and two minuses, but, realistically, probably a single plus and three minuses.

Again, it seems to be a very useful technique to be using with beginners, and the stress index provides a rationale for this practice.

The use of the Total physical response (TPR) and information gap techniques begin to tell a slightly different story. In TPR, the learner is likely to want to perform (a '+'), that performance is public (another '+'),

and the teacher may be able to evaluate (yet another '+'). The only absent ('—') feature in this regard is that a verbal response is not required. Three pluses and one minus therefore make TPR potentially quite a stressful activity. For use with beginners, one would therefore suggest that teachers modify their evaluation, and not 'score' pupils' performance, so as to lessen the stress.

Even though one thinks of warm-up exercises as fun, it is interesting to see that the index also scores them for potentially high stress (certainly higher than the first two techniques). Warm-up tasks require the learner to perform, the performance normally requires verbal output, and it is generally public. Again, one would suggest to teachers not to introduce evaluation here, so as to keep the anxiety level low.

The same goes for the use of information gap tasks. The individual has to perform, there is a verbal response, and that response is at least public in part (information gap tasks are ideally done in pairs of learners, so there is the chance of making a fool of oneself in front of at least one of one's peers). The only factor that minimises stress is that, where the whole class is engaged in such an activity, the teacher has the opportunity to evaluate only one pair of learners at a time, and learners are therefore shielded from this potential embarrassment. Of course, as in the case of story-telling, if the teacher decides to evaluate the completion of the task afterwards, there will be extra anxiety. Some teachers require pairs of learners to complete the information gap task again in front of the whole class. If this practice is used, the index suggests that it be used sparingly, and only after proper rehearsal, when the learners are confident enough to attempt it. Still, three pluses and one minus mean that this kind of task may generate a good deal of anxiety.

In the use of the Silent Way, however, there is no getting away from the conclusion that it is very stressful. This is confirmed by many learners in Silent Way classes! It scores four pluses.

Does this mean that the Silent Way should not be used with beginners? Would it be insensitive to expose such learners to so much stress? We return to this question after looking at the completed matrix:

Comparison: different methods for beginners

	Individual learner wants to perform	Verbal response required	Individual performance is public	Teacher can evaluate individual
Stories	—	—	—	—
Songs & rhymes	— / +	+	—	—
TPR	+	—	+	+ / —
Warm-up exercises	+	+	+	—
Information gap	+	+	+	—
Silent Way	+	+	+	+

The completed matrix shows a progression from less stressful to more stressful activities. Where the use of stories scores a zero on the index (no pluses; stress-generating tasks therefore absent), Songs and rhymes score 1½, TPR 2½, Warm-up exercises and information gap tasks 3 each, and the Silent Way the maximum of 4.

Does this mean that we should exclude the latter three types of task from a beginners' course? The answer is no. But the index does caution the

teacher who uses or designs the course to take things slowly. In fact, the use of highly stressful techniques such as the Silent Way can provide a good jolt to learners at exactly the time that they need to emerge from the protective emotional shell that low-scoring techniques provide.

The rationale for the use of several techniques is thus clarified by the measuring instrument that we have used above. It is offered here as one example of how teachers can make **deliberate** choices when selecting from a range of techniques. It provides, if you will, a justification for a reasoned eclecticism.

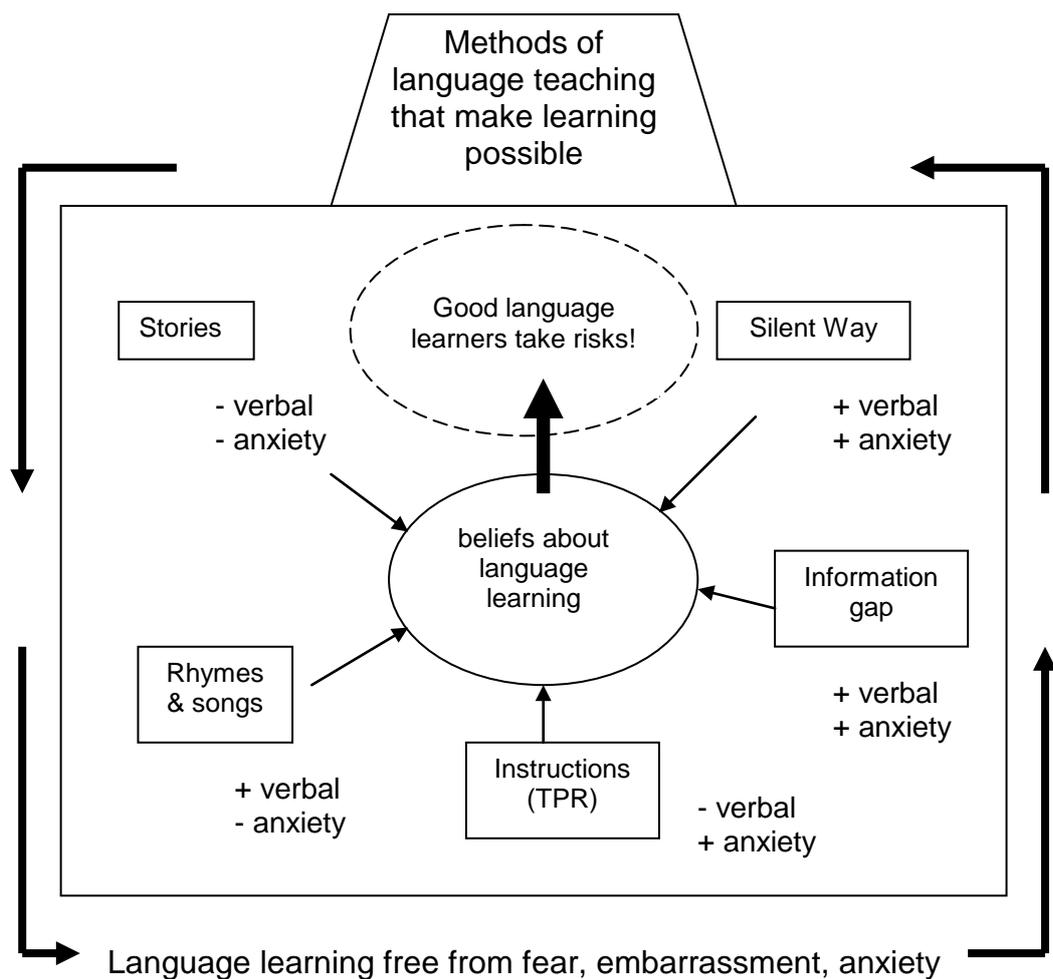
Language teaching that makes learning possible

The preceding section dealt with using, or using with care, or avoiding certain techniques of language learning. The justification for use or avoidance of techniques revolves, amongst other things, around the presence or absence of **verbal output** that is required from the learner, and the degree of **anxiety** and stress that each technique generates.

These two factors lie at the heart of the rationale for the Natural approach, but can be applied in equal measure to other methods as well, since all methods now take as their goal that they should **make language learning possible** in the classroom. In fact, this purpose is probably the single overriding criterion in the design of any language teaching material.

In the diagram on the next page, we recast the factors in terms of the notion that learners should be exposed to as much language as possible at a

level at or slightly above their own current level of understanding, but must not necessarily be forced to produce the target language right from the start. As we have seen, there are strong arguments in the literature against early oral production, which generate stress that can get in the way of learning. The diagram takes the same data as in the matrix in the previous section:



The argument of this diagram is that

- a design criterion for language teaching is that it must make learning free from embarrassment, fear and anxiety;

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- this criterion derives from the belief about language learning that good language learners take risks. If there is too great a potential embarrassment in the learning environment, risk-taking behaviour is inhibited to the detriment of language learning;
 - in order to create an environment that encourages risk-taking, the language teacher must design the course in such a way that two risk-inhibiting factors, verbal output from the learner and the accompanying anxiety, are neutralised, at least at first;
 - it is better to start a course with activities such as Stories (which require no verbal output and therefore create no anxiety) and Rhymes and songs (which, although they require verbal output, do not heighten anxiety);
 - TPR is probably preferable to information gap activities at the beginning, since it requires no verbal output;
 - stress-inducing work required by information gap tasks and in the Silent Way are best left for later in the course.

One may apply these design criteria to any course. They again underscore the thesis that designing language teaching is a deliberate, professional task, arising out of assumptions we make on how language learning takes place. We commit ourselves to styles of teaching that give expression to these assumptions.

Teaching with integrity

Our discussion has considered a number of traditional and current approaches to language teaching. Our argument has been that teachers will

feel more comfortable using any of these if they understand the assumptions about language learning lying at the root of these approaches. Specifically, to become a professional teacher who teaches with integrity, one must understand that the motivation for preferring one method to another lies in these roots. A method finds its roots in a certain belief about language learning. It is an expression of these beliefs: the style of teaching employed by the teacher is attuned to the beliefs about language learning that inform such a style.

The discussion has also suggested that looking at language teaching methods as the expression of how one believes language learning happens is an important way of making sense of a whole array of different methods. In this respect, the argument has been that it is better for one's professional development as a language teacher to select a method that is in tune with one's own beliefs as a teacher. Therefore, though we have considered a number of different methods, the discussion does not imply that any one of those is superior. There is little doubt, however, about which ones are the most influential. The communicative approach is still, in a substantial sense, the current orthodoxy, and the future direction of language teaching.

What direction the approach itself, as well as language teaching in general, takes in the future depends on how well, or badly, it combines with other methods. As the discussion has also made clear, there are a number of alternative methods to consider, even for those who profess a firm commitment to CLT.

Such alternatives are important, especially where they inform and enrich the design of language teaching. A language teacher becomes fully professional only when they are able to design their own materials for

learning. Invariably, the design of language teaching is informed by current orthodoxy and strong traditions. The challenge therefore is to design with integrity, too. Too many concessions to traditional ways may dilute and detract from the innovative; too many new, alternative techniques may create contradictions.

Though one's teaching can be informed by research, the crucible in which the future of language teaching will be decided is the classroom. It is my belief that the future of language teaching lies in the hands of the committed and competent teacher, who can design language teaching and teach language with integrity, because they have achieved an alignment between their beliefs about how language is learned, and the way that they teach.

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