

# LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS



# Constituents and Categories of Methods

## 4. INTRODUCTION

In Part One, I discussed the fundamental features of language, language learning, and language teaching that, I believe, have to be considered in conceiving, constructing, or critiquing any coherent and comprehensive L2 pedagogy. In this second part, I take a critical look at some established language teaching methods to see how far they address those fundamental features. But first, certain key terms and concepts constituting language teaching operations have to be explained. I also need to provide the rationale behind the categorization of language teaching methods presented in this book.

### 4.1. CONSTITUENTS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

A variety of labels such as approach, design, methods, practices, principles, procedures, strategies, tactics, techniques, and so on are used to describe various elements constituting language teaching. A plethora of terms and labels can hardly facilitate a meaningful and informed discussion in any area of professional activity. In this section, I attempt to tease out some of the terminological and conceptual ambiguities surrounding some of the terms and concepts used in the field of second- and foreign-language teaching.

#### 4.1.1. Method and Methodology

*Method* is central to any language teaching enterprise. Many of us in the language teaching profession use the term, method, so much and so often that we seldom recognize its problematic nature. For instance, we are hardly

aware of the fact that we use the same term, method, to refer to two different elements of language teaching: method as proposed by theorists, and method as practiced by teachers. What the teachers actually do in the classroom is different from what is advocated by the theorists. In fact, classroom-oriented research conducted by Kumaravadivelu (1993a), Nunan (1987), Thornbury (1996), and others clearly shows that even teachers who claim to follow a particular method do not actually adhere to the basic principles associated with it.

One way of clearing the confusion created by the indiscriminate use of the term, method, is to make a distinction between method and *methodology*. For the purpose of this book, I consistently use method to refer to established methods conceptualized and constructed by experts in the field (see text to come). I use the term, methodology, to refer to what practicing teachers actually do in the classroom in order to achieve their stated or unstated teaching objectives. This distinction is nothing new; it is implicit in some of the literature on language teaching. Such a distinction is, in fact, the basis by which Mackey (1965) differentiated what he called *method analysis* from *teaching analysis*. He rightly asserted:

any meaning of method must first distinguish between what a teacher teaches and what a book teaches. It must not confuse the text used with the teacher using it, or the method with the teaching of it. Method analysis is one thing, therefore, teaching analysis, quite another. Method analysis determines how teaching is done by the book; teaching analysis shows how much is done by the teacher. (p. 138)

In other words, a teaching analysis can be done only by analyzing and interpreting authentic classroom data that include the methodological practices of the teacher as revealed through classroom input and interaction, and teacher intention and learner interpretation (see Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, chap. 13). A method analysis, on the other hand, can be carried out by merely analyzing and interpreting different constituent features of a method presented in standard textbooks on language teaching methods, using any appropriate analytical framework.

#### 4.1.2. Approach, Method, and Technique

Antony (1963) was perhaps the first in modern times to articulate a framework for understanding the constituents of method. His purpose, a laudable one, was to provide much-needed coherence to the conception and representation of elements that constitute language teaching. He proposed a three-way distinction: *approach*, *method*, and *technique*. He defined approach as “a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language teaching and learning. It describes the



nature of the subject matter to be taught. It states a point of view, a philosophy, an article of faith . . ." (Antony, 1963, pp. 63–64). Thus, an approach embodies the theoretical principles governing language learning and language teaching. A method, however, is "an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural" (p. 65). As such, within one approach there can be many methods. Methods are implemented in the classroom through what are called techniques. A technique is defined as "a particular trick, strategem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective" (p. 66). The tripartite framework is hierarchical in the sense that approach informs method, and method informs techniques.

When it was introduced, the Antony framework was welcomed as a helpful tool for making sense of different parts of language teaching operations, and it was in use for a long time. However, a lack of precise formulation of the framework resulted in a widespread dissatisfaction with it. Antony himself felt that modifications and refinements of his framework are "possible" and even "desirable" primarily because the distinction between approach and method on one hand, and method and technique on the other hand, was not clearly delineated. The way approach and method are used interchangeably in some of the literature on L2 teaching testifies to the blurred boundaries between the two. Secondly, the inclusion of specific items within a constituent is sometimes based on subjective judgments. For instance, Antony considered pattern practice a method, and imitation a technique when, in fact, both of them can be classified as classroom *techniques* because they both refer to a sequence of classroom activities performed in the classroom environment, prompted by the teacher and practiced by the learner.

The Antony framework is flawed in yet another way. It attempted to portray the entire language teaching operations as a simple, hierarchical relationship between approach, method, and technique, without in any way considering the complex connections between intervening factors such as societal demands, institutional resources and constraints, instructional effectiveness, and learner needs. After taking these drawbacks into consideration, Clarke (1983) summarized the inadequacy of the Antony framework thus:

Approach, by limiting our perspective of language learning and teaching, serves as a blinder which hampers rather than encourages, professional growth. Method is so vague that it means just about anything that anyone wants it to mean, with the result that, in fact, it means nothing. And technique, by giving the impression that teaching activities can be understood as abstractions separate from the context in which they occur, obscures the fact that classroom practice is a dynamic interaction of diverse systems. (p. 111)

In short, the Antony framework did not effectively serve the purpose for which it was designed.

#### 4.1.3. Approach, Design, and Procedure

To rectify some of the limitations of the Antony framework, Richards and Rodgers (1982) attempted to revise and refine it. They proposed a system that is broader in its scope and wider in its implications. Like Antony, they too made a three-part distinction—approach, design, and procedure—but introduced new terms to capture the refinements:

The first level, *approach*, defines those assumptions, beliefs, and theories about the nature of language and the nature of language learning which operate as axiomatic constructs or reference points and provide a theoretical foundation for what language teachers ultimately do with learners in classrooms. The second level in the system, *design*, specifies the relationship of theories of language and learning to both the form and function of instructional materials and activities in instructional settings. The third level, *procedure*, comprises the classroom techniques and practices which are consequences of particular approaches and designs. (Richards & Rodgers, 1982, p. 154)

Notice that the term, *method*, does not figure in this hierarchy. That is because Richards and Rodgers preferred to use it as an umbrella term to refer to the broader relationship between theory and practice in language teaching.

As is evident, Richards and Rodgers retained the term, *approach*, to mean what it means in the Antony framework, that is, to refer primarily to the theoretical axioms governing language, language learning, and language teaching. They introduced a new term, *design*, to denote what Antony denoted by the term, *method*. *Design*, however, is broader than Antony's *method* as it includes specifications of (a) the content of instruction, that is, the syllabus, (b) learner roles, (c) teacher roles, and (d) instructional materials and their types and functions. *Procedure*, like *technique* in the Antony framework, refers to the actual moment-to-moment classroom activity. It includes a specification of context of use and a description of precisely what is expected in terms of execution and outcome for each exercise type. *Procedure*, then, is concerned with issues such as the following: the types of teaching and learning techniques, the types of exercises and practice activities, and the resources—time, space, equipment—required to implement recommended activities.

The three-tier system proposed by Richards and Rodgers (1982) is surely broader and more detailed than the Antony framework. However, a careful analysis indicates that their system is equally redundant and overlapping. For instance, while defining *approach*, the authors state that “theories at

the level of approach relate directly to the level of design since they provide the basis for determining the goals and content of language syllabus” (p. 155). While defining design, they state that design considerations “deal with assumptions about the content and the context for teaching and learning . . .” (p. 158). The boundary between approach and design is blurred here because the operational definitions of both relate to theoretical assumptions that actually belong to the realm of approach.

Furthermore, the Richards and Rodgers framework suffers from an element of artificiality in its conception and an element of subjectivity in its operation. As the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* (2000) pointed out,

at least some information on the three areas of analysis—approach, design, procedure—has to be inferred, because the proponents of each method do not always provide comprehensive outlines for the underlying theory and for all areas of practice. Therefore, determining some aspects may be a matter of interpretation of statements or materials and consequently carries the risk of misinterpretation. (p. 619)

This observation echoes a similar argument made much earlier by Pennycook (1989) who was “struck by a feeling of strain at attempts to fit disparate concepts into their framework. In many instances, their attempts to demonstrate conceptual unity for methods do not seem justifiable” (p. 602).

#### **4.1.4. Principles and Procedures**

An apparent and perhaps inherent drawback with a three-tier framework is that it is difficult to keep the boundaries separate without redundancy and overlapping. This is so particularly because we are dealing with different levels of organization, all of which form an integral part of an interdependent system. Furthermore, a three-tier framework opens the door for an interpretation that is unfortunate, and perhaps, unintended. That is, the framework appears to treat approach as a theorist/researcher activity, design as a syllabus designer/materials producer activity, and procedure as a classroom teacher/learner activity. As we saw in Part One, it is the theorist who engages in the sort of activities described under approach, activities such as providing a rationale and an account of psychosociolinguistic theories governing language learning and teaching. The activities described under method/design, which include syllabus construction, materials production, and the determination of learner/teacher roles are considered to be the responsibilities of the syllabus/materials designer and not of the classroom teacher. The teacher’s task in the classroom is what is described under technique/procedure.

The division of labor among the three groups of people involved in language learning and teaching operations, the division implicit in the three-tier frameworks, is acceptable to some extent in a traditional educational system in which a centrally planned educational agenda was handed down to the teacher. It is inadequate in the current pedagogic environment in which the teacher is increasingly playing, at the local level, multiple roles of teacher, researcher, syllabus designer, and materials producer. Recent emphases on classroom decision making (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000), teacher and learner autonomy (Benson, 2001), teacher cognition (Woods, 1996), teacher inquiry (Johnson & Golombek, 2002), and action research (Edge, 2001) attest to the shifting responsibilities of various participants involved in the learning and teaching operations. It is certainly inadequate in the emerging postmethod era because, as we see in Part Three, one of the central objectives of postmethod pedagogy is to fundamentally restructure the reified relationship between the theorist and the teacher (Kumaravivelu, 2001).

Besides, we need to keep in mind what we use such a framework for. Antony (1963) and Richards and Rodgers (1982) did not propose their frameworks with the same purpose in mind. Antony had a very limited aim of presenting “a pedagogical filing system within which many ideas, opposing or compatible, may be filed” (1963, p. 63). He merely hoped that his framework “will serve to lessen a little the terminological confusion in the language teaching field” (p. 67). In other words, his framework is meant to be a descriptive tool. Richards and Rodgers, however, had a higher goal. Their framework is an attempt to provide “insights into the internal adequacy of particular methods, as well as into the similarities and differences which exist between alternative methods” (1982, p. 168). They hoped that their framework “can be used to describe, evaluate, and compare methods in language teaching” (1982, p. 164). In other words, their framework is meant to be an evaluative tool as well.

In spite of the aforementioned claim, the Richards and Rodgers (1982) framework can be used only to describe the components of various methods as conceptualized by theorists, and as presented on paper, although, as we saw earlier, even such a limited description will be partly based on subjective interpretations. However, the framework can hardly be used to evaluate the relative effectiveness or usefulness of methods “in language teaching,” assuming it refers to what teachers do in the classroom. It does not, for instance, take into consideration several variables that shape the success or failure of classroom language learning/teaching—variables such as intake factors and intake processes (cf. chap. 2, this volume) and input modifications and instructional activities (cf. chap. 3, this volume). In other words, the relative merits of methods cannot be evaluated on the basis of a checklist, however comprehensive it may be. Besides, as a major large-scale exper-

imental study called the Pennsylvania Project revealed (Smith, 1970), comparison of language-teaching methods with the view to evaluating their classroom effectiveness is a notoriously treacherous task replete with experimental pitfalls (because not all the variables governing classroom learning and teaching can be effectively controlled in order to study the impact of a particular method on learning outcomes) and explanatory flaws (because any explanation of what is observed in the classroom has to be the result of subjective interpretation rather than objective evaluation).

A three-tier distinction has thus proved to be inadequate to “lessen a little the terminological confusion in the language-teaching field” (Antony, 1963, p. 65). The first of the triad—approach—refers to theoretical principles governing language learning and teaching. These principles are generally drawn from a number of disciplines: linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, information sciences, conversational analysis, discourse analysis, and so forth. The second part of the triad—method or design—can be part of the first component because we can, by all means, think of principles of syllabus design, principles of materials production, principles of evaluation, and so forth. The third component, of course, refers to actual classroom-teaching strategies. In other words, two major components of any systematic learning/teaching operation are the principles that shape our concepts and convictions, and the procedures that help us translate those principles into a workable plan in a specific classroom context.

In light of the just-mentioned argument, it appears to me to be useful to simplify the descriptive framework and make a two-part distinction: *principles* and *procedures*. The term, principles, may be operationally defined as a set of insights derived from theoretical and applied linguistics, cognitive psychology, information sciences, and other allied disciplines that provide theoretical bases for the study of language learning, language planning, and language teaching. The term thus includes not only the theoretical assumptions governing language learning and teaching but also those governing syllabus design, materials production, and evaluation measures. Similarly, procedures may be operationally defined as a set of teaching strategies adopted/adapted by the teacher in order to accomplish the stated and unstated, short- and long-term goals of language learning and teaching in the classroom. Thus, certain elements of Antony’s approach and method, and Richards and Rodgers’ approach and design can be subsumed under principles. Classroom events, activities, or techniques can be covered under procedures. The terms principles and procedures are not new; they are implicit in the literature and are being used widely though not uniformly or consistently. In this book, I employ these two terms, keeping in mind that they are useful only for description of methods, and not for evaluation of classroom teaching.

## 4.2. CATEGORIES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

Yet another source of tiresome ambiguity that afflicts language teaching is the absence of a principled way to categorize language teaching methods in a conceptually coherent fashion. This need has become even more acute because of what Stern (1985) called the “method boom” (p. 249) witnessed in the 1970s. The exact number of methods currently in use is unclear. It is easy to count nearly a dozen, ranging from Audiolingualism to Jazz chants. (I haven’t found one beginning with a Z yet, unless we count the Zen method!)

It is not as if the existing methods provide distinct or discrete paths to language teaching. In fact, there is considerable overlap in their theoretical as well as practical orientation to L2 learning and teaching. It is therefore beneficial, for the purpose of analysis and understanding, to categorize established methods into (a) *language-centered methods*, (b) *learner-centered methods*, and (c) *learning-centered methods* (Kumaravadivelu, 1993b). This categorization, which seeks to provide conceptual coherence, is made based on theoretical and pedagogic considerations that are presented in a nutshell below. A detailed treatment of these three categories of method follows in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

### 4.2.1. Language-Centered Methods

Language-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with linguistic forms. These methods (such as Audiolingual Method) seek to provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced linguistic structures through form-focused exercises in class, assuming that a preoccupation with form will ultimately lead to the mastery of the target language and that the learners can draw from this formal repertoire whenever they wish to communicate in the target language outside the class. According to this view, language development is more intentional than incidental. That is, learners are expected to pay continual and conscious attention to linguistic features through systematic planning and sustained practice in order to learn and to use them.

Language-centered pedagogists treat language learning as a linear, additive process. In other words, they believe that language develops primarily in terms of what Rutherford (1987) called “accumulated entities” (p. 4). That is, a set of grammatical structures and vocabulary items are carefully selected for their usability, and graded for their difficulty. The teacher’s task is to introduce one discrete linguistic item at a time and help the learners practice it until they internalize it. Secondly, supporters of language-centered methods advocate explicit introduction, analysis, and explanation of linguistic systems. That is, they believe that the linguistic system is simple

enough and our explanatory power clear enough to provide explicit rules of thumb, and explain them to the learners in such a way that they can understand and internalize them.

#### 4.2.2. Learner-Centered Methods

Learner-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with learner needs, wants, and situations. These methods (such as Communicative Language Teaching) seek to provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced linguistic structures *and* communicative notions/functions through meaning-focused activities, assuming that a preoccupation with form *and* function will ultimately lead to target language mastery and that the learners can make use of both formal and functional repertoire to fulfill their communicative needs outside the class. In this view, as in the previous case, language development is more intentional than incidental.

Learner-centered pedagogists aim at making language learners grammatically accurate and communicatively fluent. They keep in mind the learner's real-life language use in social interaction or for academic study, and present linguistic structures in communicative contexts. In spite of strong arguments that emphasize the cyclical and analytical nature of communicative syllabuses (Munby, 1978; Wilkins, 1976; see chap. 3, this volume, for more details), learner-centered methods remain, basically, linear and additive. Proponents of learner-centered methods, like those of language-centered methods, believe in accumulated entities. The one major difference is that in the case of language-centered methods, the accumulated entities represent linguistic structures, and in the case of learner-centered methods, they represent structures plus notions and functions. Furthermore, just as language-centered pedagogists believe that the linguistic structures of a language could be sequentially presented and explained, the learner-centered pedagogists also believe that each notional/functional category could be matched with one or more linguistic forms, and sequentially presented and explained to the learner.

#### 4.2.3. Learning-Centered Methods

Learning-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with cognitive processes of language learning (see chap. 2, this volume, for details). These methods (such as the Natural Approach) seek to provide opportunities for learners to participate in open-ended meaningful interaction through problem-solving tasks in class, assuming that a preoccupation with meaning-making will ultimately lead to target language mastery and that the learners can deploy the still-developing interlanguage to achieve linguistic as well as pragmatic knowledge/ability. In this case, unlike in the

other two, language development is more incidental than intentional. That is, grammar construction can take place when the learners pay attention to the process of meaning-making, even if they are not explicitly focused on the formal properties of the language.

According to learning-centered pedagogists, language development is a nonlinear process, and therefore, does not require preselected, presequenced systematic language input but requires the creation of conditions in which learners engage in meaningful activities in class. They believe that a language is best learned when the focus is not on the language, that is, when the learner's attention is focused on understanding, saying, and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features. They also hold the view that linguistic systems are too complex to be neatly analyzed, explicitly explained, and profitably presented to the learner.

In seeking to redress what they consider to be fundamental flaws that characterize previous methods, learning-centered pedagogists seek to fill, what Long (1985) called a "psycholinguistic vacuum" (p. 79). That is, they claim to derive insights from psycholinguistic research on language development in an attempt to incorporate them in language teaching methods. As a result, the changes they advocate relate not just to syllabus specifications—as it happened in the case of the shift from language-centered to learner-centered methods—but to all aspects of learning/teaching operations: syllabus design, materials production, classroom teaching, outcomes assessment, and teacher education.

The categories of language teaching methods just described are summarized in Fig. 4.1. A word of caution about this figure is in order. The figure represents method analysis, not teaching analysis. From a classroom methodological point of view, the three categories do not represent distinct entities with clear-cut boundaries. They overlap considerably, particularly during the transitional time when dissatisfaction with one method yields slowly to the evolution of another.

### 4.3. DESIGNER NONMETHODS

Part of the method boom that Stern talked about has given us what are called *new methods*. They include *Community Language Learning*, the *Silent Way*, *Suggestopedia*, and *Total Physical Response*. All these new methods advocate a humanistic approach to language learning and teaching. Community Language Learning treats teachers as language counselors who are sensitive to the language learners' emotional struggle to cope with the challenges of language learning. They are supposed to create a nonthreatening atmosphere in the classroom, forming a community of learners who build trust among themselves in order to help each other. The Silent Way believes that teachers



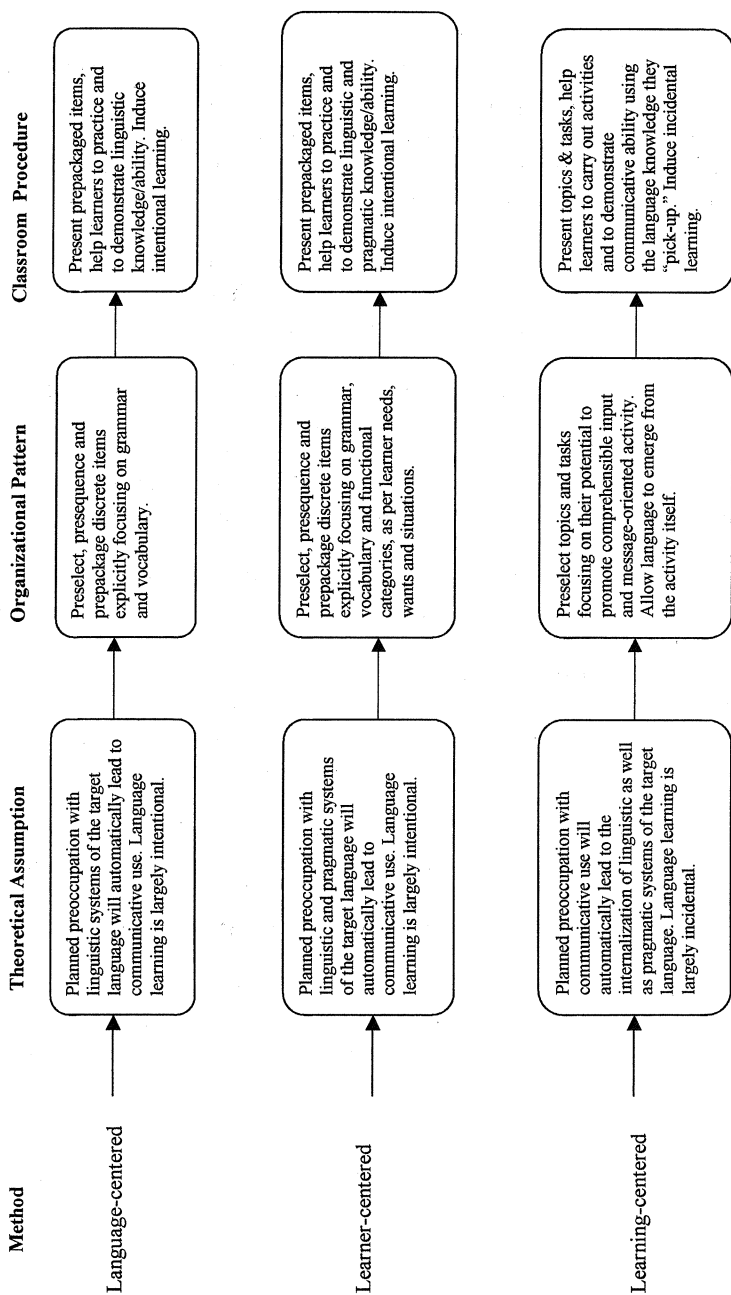


FIG. 4.1. Categories of language teaching methods.

should be silent in class and talk only when absolutely necessary. Using color charts and color rods as props, teachers are expected to encourage learners to express their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, and in the process, learn the language. Suggestopedia, which now has even a fancier name, *Desuggestopedia*, aims at removing psychological barriers to learning through the psychological notion of “suggestion.” Using fine arts such as music, art, and drama, teachers are advised to create a comfortable environment in class in order to eliminate any fear of failure on the part of the learners. Total Physical Response recommends that teachers activate their learners’ motor skills through a command sequence in which learners perform an action, such as standing up, sitting down, walking to the board, and so forth.

These new methods have also been dubbed as *designer methods*. I prefer to call them *designer nonmethods* because none of them, in my view, deserves the status of a method. They are all no more than classroom procedures that are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of a learner-centered pedagogy. From a classroom procedural point of view, they are highly innovative and are certainly useful in certain cases. But, they are not full-fledged methods. As I have argued elsewhere (Kumaravivelu, 1995), a method, to be considered a method, must satisfy at least two major criteria. First, it should be informed by a set of theoretical principles derived from feeder disciplines and a set of classroom procedures directed at practicing teachers. Both the underlying principles and the suggested procedures should address the factors and processes governing learning and teaching (see Part One, this volume) in a coherent fashion. Second, a method should be able to guide and sustain various aspects of language learning and teaching operations, particularly in terms of curricular content (e.g., grammar and vocabulary), language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and proficiency levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced).

None of the designer methods satisfies the just-cited criteria. In spite of their limitations, they have been wrongly treated as new methods, a treatment that really requires a stretch of interpretation, as seen in the case of Richards and Rodgers (1986) who attempted, rather laboriously, to fit the new methods into their tripartite framework of approach, design, and procedure. In fact, a reputed Canadian scholar expressed surprise at “the tolerant and positive reception the new methods were given by sophisticated methodologists and applied linguistics in North America. One could have expected them to be slaughtered one by one under the searing light of theory and research” (Stern, 1985, p. 249).

#### 4.4. A SPECIAL TASK

Before concluding this section on categories of language teaching methods, a brief note on the status of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is in order. As the novelty of communicative language teaching is gradually

wearing thin (see chap. 6, this volume, for details), TBLT is gaining ground. The word, “communicative,” which was ubiquitously present in the titles of scholarly books and student textbooks published during the 1980s is being replaced by yet another word, “task.” Since the late 1980s, we have been witnessing a steady stream of books on TBLT, in addition to numerous journal articles. There are research-based scholarly books on the nature and scope of pedagogic tasks (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Crookes & Gass, 1993; Skehan, 1998). There are books about task-based language learning and teaching in general (Ellis, 2003; Long, in press; Nunan, 2004; Prabhu, 1987). There are also specifically targeted books that provide tasks for language learning (Gardner & Miller, 1996; Willis, 1996), tasks for language teaching (Johnson, 2003; Nunan, 1989; Parrott, 1993), tasks for teacher education (Tanner & Green, 1998), tasks for classroom observation (Wajnryb, 1992), and tasks for language awareness (Thornbury, 1997).

In spite of the vast quantity of the published materials on TBLT, there is no consensus definition of what a *task* is. For instance, more than 15 years ago, Breen (1987) defined task as “a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning—from the simple and brief exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making” (p. 23). In a recent work on TBLT, Ellis (2003), after carefully considering various definitions available in the literature, synthesized them to derive a composite, lengthy definition:

A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes. (p. 16)

The definitions given not only bring out the complex nature of a task but it also signifies a simple fact. That is, as I pointed out more than a decade ago (Kumaravivelu, 1993b), a language learning and teaching task is not inextricably linked to any one particular language teaching method. Task is not a methodological construct; it is a curricular content. In other words, in relation to the three categories of method outlined in this section, there can very well be *language-centered tasks*, *learner-centered tasks*, and *learning-centered tasks*. To put it simply, language-centered tasks are those that draw the learner’s attention primarily and explicitly to the formal properties of the language. For instance, tasks presented in Fotos and Ellis (1991) and also in Fotos (1993), which they appropriately call *grammar tasks*, come un-

der this category. Learner-centered tasks are those that direct the learner's attention to formal as well as functional properties of the language. Tasks for the communicative classroom suggested by Nunan (1989) illustrate this type. And, learning-centered tasks are those that engage the learner mainly in the negotiation, interpretation, and expression of meaning, without any explicit focus on form and/or function. Problem-solving tasks suggested by Prabhu (1987) are learning centered.

In light of the present discussion, I do not, in this book, treat the designer methods and TBLT as independent language teaching methods. I do, however, refer to them for illustrative purposes as and when appropriate.

#### **4.5. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I examined the use of terms and concepts that constitute language teaching operations in general. I argued that for the sake of simplicity and practicality, it is beneficial to have a two-tier system consisting of principles and procedures. I also presented a rationale for the classification of language-teaching methods into language-, learner-, and learning-centered methods. I shall henceforth be using these terms and categories as operationally defined and described in this chapter. The next three chapters in Part Two deal with the theoretical principles and classroom procedures of language-, learner-, and learning-centered methods.

# Language-Centered Methods

## 5. INTRODUCTION

Language teaching methods evolve and improve over time as their merits and demerits become more and more apparent with the accumulation of experience and experimentation, ultimately leading to the development of a new method with a new label. During the transitional time when dissatisfaction with one method results in the gradual development of another, there will necessarily be overlapping tendencies. Therefore, a method in a later phase of its life may appear to be slightly different from what it was in an earlier phase. But still, in order to fully understand the fundamental characteristics of any given category of method and to differentiate it meaningfully from other categories, it is necessary to go back to the foundational texts that provide what may be called a canonical description of the theoretical principles and classroom procedures of a method that may prototypically represent the category to which it belongs. With that understanding, I focus in this chapter on what is known as *audiolingual method*, which illustrates the essential characteristics of language-centered methods.

Although audiolingual method is considered to be “very much an American method” (Ellis, 1990, p. 21), some of its basics can be traced to almost simultaneous developments in Britain and the United States. Toward the second half of the 20th century, British applied linguists such as Hornby, Palmer, and West developed principles and procedures of what came to be called the *structural-situational method*. It primarily centered around the triple principles of *selection*, *gradation*, and *presentation*. Selection deals with the choice of lexical and grammatical content, gradation with the organization

and sequencing of content, and presentation with the aims and activities of classroom teaching. As early as in 1936, Palmer, West, and their associates selected and graded a vocabulary list, which was later revised by West and published in 1953 with the title, *A General Service List of English Words*. The list consisted of a core vocabulary of about 2,000 words selected on the basis of such criteria as frequency, usefulness, and productivity and graded for complexity. Likewise, Palmer and Hornby attempted to classify major grammatical structures into sentence patterns and also sought to introduce them in situational dialogues. Hornby's book, *A Guide to Patterns and Usage of English*, published in 1954 became a standard reference book of basic English sentence patterns for textbook writers and classroom teachers.

As the British applied linguists were engaged in developing the structural-situational method, their American counterparts were called upon by their government already drawn into World War II to devise effective, short-term, intensive courses to teach conversational skills in German, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and other languages to army personnel who could work as interpreters, code-room assistants, and translators. In response, American applied linguists established what was called Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), which moved away from the prevailing reading/writing-oriented instruction to one that emphasized listening and speaking. After the war and by the mid-1950s, the program evolved into a full-fledged audiolingual method of teaching, and quickly became the predominant American approach to teaching English as second language.

A series of foundational texts published in the 1960s by American scholars provided the much needed pedagogic resources for language-centered methods. In an influential book titled *Language and Language Learning: Theory and Practice*, Brooks (1960) offered a comprehensive treatment of the audiolingual method. This was followed by Fries and Fries (1961), whose *Foundations of English Teaching* presented a corpus of structural and lexical items selected and graded into three proficiency levels—beginning, intermediate, and advanced. The corpus also included suggestions for designing contextual dialogues in which the structural and lexical items could be incorporated. Yet another seminal book, *Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach*, by Lado (1964) provided further impetus for the spread of the audiolingual method. Appearing in the same year was a widely acclaimed critical commentary on the audiolingual method titled *The Psychologist and the Foreign Language Teacher*, by Rivers (1964).

Although the British structural-situational method focused on the situational context and the functional content of language more than the American audiolingual method did, similarities between them are quite striking. Part of the reason is that linguists on both sides of the Atlantic were influenced by the tenets of structural linguistics and behavioral psychology. In view of that common ground, I combine the two traditions under one

widely used label, *audiolingual method*, and discuss its theoretical principles and classroom procedures.

## 5.1. THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

As mentioned, the fundamental principles of language-centered pedagogy are drawn from structural linguistics and behavioral psychology. These two schools of thought from sister disciplines have informed the theory of language, language learning, language teaching, and curricular specifications of language-centered pedagogy.

### 5.1.1. Theory of Language

Language-centered pedagogists believed in the theory of language proposed and propagated by American structural linguists during the 1950s. Structural linguists treated language as a system of systems consisting of several hierarchically linked building blocks: phonemes, morphemes, phrases, clauses, and sentences, each with its own internal structure. These subsystems of language were thought to be linearly connected in a structured, systematic, and rule-governed way; that is, certain phonemes systematically cluster together to form a morpheme, certain morphemes systematically cluster together to form a phrase, and so forth. Secondly, structural linguists viewed language as aural-oral, thus emphasizing listening and speaking. Speech was considered primary, forming the very basis of language. Structure was viewed as being at the heart of speech. Thirdly, every language was looked upon as unique, each having a finite number of structural patterns. Each structure can be analyzed, described, systematized, and graded, and by implication, can be learned and taught by taking a similar discrete path.

Structural linguists rejected the views of traditional grammarians, who depended on philosophical and mentalistic approaches to the study of language. Instead, structuralists claimed to derive their view of language through a positivist and empiricist approach. A scientific approach to the study of language, it was thought, would help identify the structural patterns of language in a more rigorous way. Such an emphasis on scientific methods of linguistic analysis dovetailed well with the views of behavioral psychologists whose antimentalist views of human learning informed the audiolingual theory of language learning.

### 5.1.2. Theory of Language Learning

Language-centered pedagogists derived their theory of language learning from *behaviorism*, a school of American psychology which was popular during the 1950s and '60s. Like structural linguists, behavioral psychologists

too were skeptical about mentalism and rejected any explanation of human behavior in terms of emotive feelings or mental processes. They sought a scientifically based approach for analyzing and understanding human behavior. For them, human behavior can be reduced to a series of stimuli that trigger a series of corresponding responses. Consequently, they looked at all learning as a simple mechanism of stimulus, response, and reinforcement. Experience is the basis of all learning, and all learning outcomes can be observed and measured in the changes that occur in behavior.

Given their belief that all learning is governed by stimulus–response–reinforcement mechanisms, behaviorists did not make any distinction between general learning and language learning. Their theory of language learning can be summed up in a series of assumptions they made:

- First and foremost, learning to speak a language is the same as learning to ride a bicycle or drive a car. Language learning, then, is no different from the learning of other school subjects like math or science. It is no more than a systematic accumulation of consciously collected discrete pieces of knowledge gained through repeated exposure, practice, and application. This is a central belief that logically leads to all other assumptions of varying importance.

- Second, language learning is just a process of mechanical habit formation through repetition. Forming a habit, in the context of language learning, is described as developing the ability to perform a particular linguistic feature such as a sound, a word, or a grammatical item automatically, that is, without paying conscious attention to it. Such a habit can be formed only through repeated practice aided by positive reinforcement. Bloomfield (1942), a prominent structural linguist, in his *Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Foreign Language*, articulated the structuralist's view of language learning very succinctly: "The command of a language is a matter of practice. . . . practice everything until it becomes second nature" (p. 16). He also emphasized that "Language learning is overlearning: Anything else is of no use" (p. 12).

- Third, habit formation takes place by means of analogy rather than analysis. Analysis involves problem solving, whereas analogy involves the perception of similarities and differences. In the context of language learning, this means an inductive approach, in which learners themselves identify the underlying structure of a pattern, is preferable to a deductive approach. Pattern practice, therefore, is an important tool of language learning.

- Fourth, language learning is a linear, incremental, additive process. That is, it entails mastering of one discrete item at a time, moving to the next only after the previous one has been fully mastered. It also involves gradually adding one building block after another, thus accumulating, in



due course, all the linguistic elements that are combined to form the totality of a language. Because speech is primary, discrete items of language can be learned effectively if they are presented in spoken form before they are seen in the written form.

- Finally, discrete items of language should be introduced in carefully constructed dialogues embedded in a carefully selected linguistic and cultural context. Language should not be separated from culture, and words should be incorporated in a matrix of references to the culture of the target language community.

These fundamental assumptions about language learning deeply influenced the theory of language teaching adopted by language-centered pedagogists.

### 5.1.3. Theory of Language Teaching

Audiolingual theory of language teaching is, in fact, a mirror image of its theory of language learning. Because learning a language is considered to involve forming habits in order to assimilate and use a hierarchical system of systems, language teaching is nothing more than a planned presentation of those (sub)systems combined with provision of opportunities for repetition. The purpose of teaching, therefore, is twofold: In the initial stage, the teacher, using a textbook, serves as a model providing samples of linguistic input, and then in the later stage, acts as a skillful manipulator of questions, commands, and other cues in order to elicit correct responses from the learner. Linguistic input is, of course, presented in the form of dialogues because they involve

a natural and exclusive use of the audio-lingual skills. All the elements of the sound-system appear repeatedly, including the suprasegmental phonemes, which are often the most difficult for the learner. All that is learned is meaningful, and what is learned in one part of a dialogue often makes meaning clear in another. (Brooks, 1964, p. 145)

The emphasis on dialogues also takes care of the primacy of speech as well as the strict sequencing of four language skills in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Given the preference of analogy over analysis, pattern practice was considered to be the most important aspect of teaching, because it “capitalizes on the mind’s capacity to perceive identity of structure where there is difference in content and its quickness to learn by analogy” (Brooks, 1964, p. 146). Besides, teaching the basic patterns helps the learner’s performance become habitual and automatic. The teacher’s major task is to drill the ba-

sic patterns. Learners “require drill, drill, and more drill, and only enough vocabulary to make such drills possible” (Hockett, 1959). During the process of drilling, the learners should be carefully guided through a series of carefully designed exercises, thereby eliminating the possibility for making errors. As the learners are helped to perform the drills, they are supposed to inductively learn the grammatical structure being practiced.

Language-centered pedagogists thus drew heavily from structural linguistics and behavioral psychology in order to conceptualize their principles of language teaching. And, in tune with the spirit that prevailed in these two disciplines at that time, they dubbed their approach to language teaching “scientific,” as reflected in the title of Lado’s 1964 book, mentioned earlier.

#### 5.1.4. Content Specifications

Language-centered methods adhere to the synthetic approach to syllabus design in which the content of learning and teaching is defined in terms of discrete items of grammatical and lexical forms of the language that are presented to the learners (see chap. 3, this volume, for details). In other words, linguistic forms constitute the organizing principle for syllabus construction. Drawing from the available inventory of linguistic forms compiled by grammarians through standard linguistic analyses, the syllabus designer selects and sequences the phonological, lexical, and grammatical elements of the language that can be included in graded textbooks used for classroom teaching. The teacher presents the elements of language forms (in terms of nouns, verbs, adjectives, articles, relative clauses, subordinate clauses, etc.) one by one to the learners, who are then supposed to put them together to figure out the totality of the language system. The primary task of the learner is to synthesize the discrete items of language in order to develop adequate knowledge/ability in the language.

*Selection* and *gradation*, that is, what items to select and in what sequence to present them are but two challenges facing the syllabus designer. Language-centered pedagogists implicitly followed the frequency, range, and availability criteria for selection identified by Mackey (1965). Recall from chapter 3 that *frequency* refers to the items that the learners are likely to encounter most, whereas *range* refers to the spread of an item across texts or contexts. Frequency relates to where the item is used, by whom, and for what purposes. Availability is determined by the degree to which an item is necessary and appropriate. Similarly, for gradation purposes, language-centered pedagogists followed the criteria of complexity, regularity, and productivity (cf. chap. 3, this volume). Recall that the first principle deals with a movement from the easy to the difficult, the second from the regular to the irregular, and the third from the more useful to the less useful.

Although the principles of selection and gradation have been found to be useful for organizing language input presented to the learner in a classroom context, critics have been skeptical about the rationale governing the principles. It is difficult to establish usable criteria for selection and gradation that are pedagogically and psychologically sound. As Corder (1973) rightly observed, “we simply do not know to what extent linguistic categories have psychological reality, and therefore to what extent what might be a logical linguistic sequencing of items in a syllabus is psychologically logical, and therefore the optimum ordering from a learning point of view” (p. 308). The paradox, however, is that “in spite of doubts about the feasibility of a sequential arrangement, the grammar of a language cannot be taught all at once. Some sort of selection and sequencing is needed, and therefore a grammatical syllabus must be provided” (Stern, 1992, pp. 139–140). In order to address this imperative, language-centered pedagogists posited what they considered to be a reasonable and workable set of criteria.

This section on the theoretical principles briefly dealt with the conceptual underpinnings of language, language learning, language teaching, and curricular specifications of language-centered methods. As we will see, these theoretical beliefs are very much reflected in the classroom procedures that practicing teachers are advised to follow.

## **5.2. CLASSROOM PROCEDURES**

The aims and activities of any language teaching method can be analyzed and understood, in part, by studying the input and interactional modifications that the teachers are advised to carry out for promoting desired learning outcomes in the classroom (see chap. 3, this volume, for details). In the following sections, we consider the nature and relevance of input and interactional modifications with reference to language-centered methods.

### **5.2.1. Input Modifications**

Of the three types of input modifications discussed in chapter 3, language-centered methods adhere almost exclusively to form-based input modifications. The other two types (i.e., meaning-based and form- and meaning-based input) rarely figure in language-centered methods because, as we saw in the earlier sections of this chapter, linguistic form has been the driving force behind their learning and teaching operations, and the idea of negotiated meaning in a communicative context was not of any considerable importance. Language-centered pedagogists believe that form-based input modifications are not only necessary and but also sufficient for the development of linguistic as well as pragmatic knowledge/ability in the L2. For

them, manipulating input entails selecting grammatical items, grading them in a principled fashion, and making them salient for the learner through a predominantly teacher-fronted instruction that explicitly draws the learner's attention to grammar. Such form-focused instruction is coupled with clear explanation and conscious error correction.

The grammatical items of the target language are introduced to the learners mostly through structural patterns. In a popular handbook of the times, Paulston and Bruder (1975) provided a comprehensive, 145-page long index of structural patterns arranged in alphabetical order. The first two entries, for instance, are about adjectives and adverbs. The grammatical forms listed are as follows (p. 51):

### ADJECTIVES

#### Adjective comparison

1. (*as* Adj. *as*; *the same X as*)
2. (adj. *-er than*; *more/less -ly than*; *more/less Noun than*)
3. (adj. *-est*; *most/least -ly*; *most/least Noun*)

#### Demonstrative

#### Indefinite

*much/many*

*other/another*

*some/any*

#### Phrases

#### Possessive

### ADVERBS

*already/yet*

#### Comparison

#### Frequency

*here/there*

#### Manner

*by + Noun/Verb/-ing*

*-ly*

*with + Noun*

*too/enough*

#### Place and time of expressions

For purposes of teaching and testing linguistic forms such as the two just shown, Paulston and Bruder suggested three types of drills: mechanical, meaningful, and communicative. As the following examples indicate, me-

chanical drills are automatic manipulative patterns aimed at habit formation. The learner response is fully controlled and there is only one correct way of responding. Meaningful drills have the same objective of mechanical habit formation, but the responses may be correctly expressed in more than one way. Communicative drills are supposed to help learners transfer structural patterns to appropriate communicative situations; but, in reality, it is still “a drill rather than free communication because we are still within the realm of the cue-response pattern” (Paulston & Bruder, 1975, p. 15).

Paulston and Bruder also give examples of what kind of linguistic input that will be provided by the teacher in a classroom context. For instance, to teach the first of the three patterns of adjective comparison already listed, the authors provide the following substitution drills (adapted from pp. 55–56):

Pattern: Adjective Comparison 1 (Adj. *as; the same X as*)

(a) Mechanical drill: Teaching Point: *Practice Pattern*

Model: Teacher (T): Our winter is as long as theirs.  
(summer/warm)

Students (S): Our summer is as warm as theirs.

T: city/polluted	S: Our city is as polluted as theirs.
lake/cold	Our lake is as cold as theirs.
work/difficult	Our work is as difficult as theirs.
apartment/big	Our apartment is as big as theirs.

(b) Meaningful drill: Teaching Point: *Use of Pattern*

Model: T: VW's in my country -----.

S: VW's in my country are (not as cheap as here)  
(not the same price as here)

T: The winter in A -----.

Women's style in A -----.

The seasons in A -----.

Houses in A are -----.

(c) Communicative drill: Teaching Point: *Communicative Use*

T: Compare with your country. Pollution.

S: (The pollution here is as bad as in my country.)

T: traffic  
drivers  
prices  
cars  
TV  
newspapers

As these examples clearly show, the linguistic input exposed to the learners in the classroom are all carefully controlled. As we see in the following section, the use of such a carefully engineered and exclusively grammar-oriented language input cannot but limit the nature and scope of interaction in the classroom.

### 5.2.2. Interactional Activities

The interactional activities of teachers and learners in a typical audio-lingual classroom are characterized in terms of three Ps—*presentation*, *practice*, and *production*. At the presentation stage, the already selected and graded linguistic items are introduced through a carefully constructed dialogue that contains several examples of the new items. The dialogue may also provide, if set in a specific sociocultural context, new insights into the culture of the target language community. Learners hear the tape recording of the model dialogue (or hear a reading of it by their teacher), repeat each line, and sometimes act out the dialogue. They are also encouraged to memorize the dialogue. At this stage, the learners are supposed to begin to grasp, mostly through analogy, how a particular structure works. Where necessary, the teacher acts as the language informant, providing additional information or explanation about relevant grammatical rules.

At the second stage, the learners practice the new linguistic items through mechanical, meaningful, or communicative drills. The pattern practice consists of isolated, decontextualized sentences, with the same grammatical structure but different lexical items. They are also given substitution tables (see boxed examples to come), which help them see the pattern governing the grammatical structure involved. As Chastain (1971) correctly observed, during this whole process of drilling the dialogue and the structures,

the students are carefully led in minimal steps through a series of exercises in which the possibility of error is almost eliminated, and the opportunity for practice is expanded to the fullest. The students are not supposed to analyze and search for answers, but to respond immediately to the stimulus of the teacher. . . . (pp. 34–35)

The learners are then sent to language lab (if available) for further drills in sentence patterns as well as in stress, rhythm, and intonation. This is usually followed by exercises in reading and writing, which also involve the use of the grammar and vocabulary already familiarized. Thus, the language skills are presented and practiced in isolation and in rigid sequence: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

At the production stage, the learners are given the opportunity to role-play dialogues similar to the ones introduced in class or in the language lab.

They are supposed to modify the language they have memorized in order to vary their production. They are also encouraged to talk about a selected topic in a carefully controlled context. Once this is all done, they are believed to have developed adequate linguistic and pragmatic knowledge/ability to use the newly learned language for communicative purposes outside the classroom. The assumption here is that they will be able to successfully transfer their linguistic knowledge of discrete items of grammar into communicative use in appropriate contexts, a questionable assumption that we revisit shortly.

A recent rendering of audiolingual teaching taken from Johnson (2001, pp. 173–174) illustrates some of the features of input and interactional modifications already described. Johnson provides an example of part of a lesson dealing with two sentence patterns: *HAVE + just + -ed*, and *HAVE + not + -ed + yet*. The use of capitals for *HAVE* indicates that the reference is to the verb as a whole, including all its constituent forms such as *has*, *have*, and others, and *-ed* refers to the past participle of verbs.

Objectives: to teach the present perfect tense, with *just* and *yet*. Some examples:

*I have just picked up the pen.*

*She has just opened the door.*

*They have just read the book.*

*I haven't picked up the pen yet.*

*She hasn't opened the door yet.*

*They haven't read the book yet.*

### Step 1 Demonstrating the sentence pattern *HAVE + just + -ed*

Actions are done in front of the class, sometimes by the teacher and sometimes by a pupil. For example, the teacher picks up a pen and says *I have just picked up the pen*. Then a pupil opens the door and the teacher says *She has just opened the door*.

### Step 2 Practicing *HAVE + just + -ed*

(a) **Drill** Pupils form sentences from a table:

I			
We			(to close) the window (to switch on) the light
They	(to have)	Just	
He/she			(to play) football (to walk) home
You			

**(b) Drill** The teacher says sentences like the ones on the left below. Chosen pupils make **HAVE + just + -ed** sentences (as in the example on the right):

*She's closing the window.*

*She's just closed the window.*

*She's going to switch on the light.*

*They will play football.*

### Step 3 Demonstrating and practicing HAVE + not + -ed + yet

**(a) Demonstration** Show a diary for the day:

7.30	get up	10.00	phone Bill
8.00	wash	12.00	visit Jane (for lunch)
9.00	eat breakfast	2.00	take dog for walk

Teacher says:

*It's 8.30. I'm late. I haven't washed yet.*

*It's 9.30. Mary's late. She hasn't eaten breakfast yet.*

**(b) Drill** Pupils form sentences from the table:

I				
We		(to eat)	John	
They	(to have) not	(to phone)	The dog for a walk	yet
He/she		(to visit)	Dinner	
You		(to take)	Mary	

This is only part of a lesson. Think of what is needed to finish it . . .

To conclude this section, the classroom procedures explained and illustrated bring out the limitations of input as well as interactional modifications associated with language-centered methods. With regard to input, the emphasis has been on form-based modifications to the neglect of meaning-based activities. Likewise, the interactional modifications have been confined to interaction as a textual activity, which focuses on syntactic aspects of language. What has not been seriously taken into account is interaction



as interpersonal activity, which focuses on establishing and maintaining social relationships, and interaction as ideational activity, which focuses on expression, interpretation, and negotiation of one's own experience.

### 5.3. A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Audiolingual method represents a milestone in the annals of language teaching for one good reason: Unlike earlier methods (such as Grammar-Translation method), it was based on well-articulated and well-coordinated theories of language, language learning, and language teaching, prompting its proponents to call it a "scientific" method. Although the method can hardly be called scientific in the normal sense of the term, there is no doubt that its proponents adhered to a highly rational view of learning and advocated a highly systematic way of teaching, both derived from the linguistic and psychological knowledge-base available at that time.

The systematic nature of language-centered methods proved to be immensely helpful to the classroom teacher. The entire pedagogic agenda was considered to be teacher friendly, as it provided a neat rules-of-thumb framework for teachers with which to work. It could be used at all proficiency levels. It was blessed with a narrowly defined objective of mastery of grammatical structures, aided by coherently designed syllabuses with preselected and presequenced items, and clearly delineated evaluation measures that focus on assessing the learning of discrete items of language. The presentation–practice–production sequence put the teacher firmly in charge of classroom proceedings, as it "is relatively easy to organize, and comes bundled with a range of techniques which, besides having the potential to organize large groups of students efficiently, also demonstrate the power relations within the classroom, since the teacher is the centre of what is happening at all times" (Skehan, 1998, p. 94). In addition, it was easy to train a large number of teachers in the principles and procedures of language-centered methods of teaching in a fairly short period of time.

Being systematic is, of course, different from being successful. How can the merits and demerits of language-centered methods be estimated? In the preface to the second edition of his authoritative book on audiolingual method, Brooks (1964) declared: "the comfortable grammar-translation days are over. The new challenge is to teach language as communication, face-to-face communication between speakers and writer-to-reader communication in books" (p. vii). As this statement clearly indicates, the central goal of language-centered methods, in spite of their unmistakable emphasis on the mastery of grammatical structures, is indeed "to teach language as communication." It is, therefore, only proper to assess whether language-centered pedagogists achieved the goal they set for themselves.

What does it mean “to teach language as communication” and to what extent are the language-centered methods conceptually and procedurally equipped to deal with it? Interestingly, although the phrase “teaching language as communication” was coined by language-centered pedagogists, it was later appropriated by learner-centered pedagogists and was used as a slogan for communicative language teaching (see chap. 6, this volume, for details). In a pioneering book on communicative language teaching titled, appropriately, *Teaching Language as Communication*, Widdowson (1978) made a useful distinction between language usage and language use:

The first of these is the citation of words and sentences as manifestations of the language system, and the second is the way the system is realized for normal communicative purposes. Knowing a language is often taken to mean having a knowledge of correct usage but this knowledge is of little utility on its own: it has to be complemented by a knowledge of appropriate use. A knowledge of use must of necessity include a knowledge of usage but the reverse is not the case: it is possible for someone to have learned a large number of sentence patterns and a large number of words which can fit into them without knowing how they are actually put to communicative use. (pp. 18–19)

Widdowson goes on to argue that the teaching of usage does not guarantee a knowledge of use, implying that any teaching of language as communication entails the teaching of language use, not just language usage. In a later work, he states the problem of language-centered methods succinctly: “the structural means of teaching would appear to be inconsistent with the communicative ends of learning” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 159).

Experiential as well as empirical evidence on the effectiveness of language-centered methods revealed that the learners, at the end of their language learning, were better at language usage than at language use. To put it differently, they were able to develop linguistic knowledge/ability but not pragmatic knowledge/ability. There are several factors that contributed to this less-than-desirable outcome. First, language-centered pedagogists failed to recognize that superficial linguistic behavior in terms of structures and vocabulary, even if it becomes habitual, does not in any way entail the internalization of the underlying language system required for effective communication. Second, they seldom acknowledged that communicative situations are far more complex and that, as V. Cook (1991) pointed out, “if communication is the goal of language teaching, its content needs to be based on an analysis of communication itself, which is not covered properly by structures and vocabulary” (p. 137). Finally, they assumed, wrongly, that the learners will be able to successfully transfer their knowledge of isolated items of grammar and vocabulary and automatically apply it to real-life communicative situations outside the classroom. The transfer did not occur

primarily because, as Rivers (1972) argued, skill getting is fundamentally different from skill using.

The theoretical bases of language-centered pedagogy signify at once its strengths as well as its weaknesses. Although the solid, theoretical foundation governing its orientation to language, language learning, and language teaching gave language-centered pedagogy a principled, systematic, and coherent base, it also contributed to its demise. Its theory turned out to be flawed, and a flawed theory can hardly result in a flawless outcome. Severe criticism about its theory came from the two disciplines that the pedagogy was totally dependent upon: psychology and linguistics.

The advent of cognitive psychology and Chomskyan linguistics shed new insights that shook the very foundation of the psychological and linguistic principles upon which the language-centered pedagogy was based. Taking a mentalistic approach, cognitive psychologists focused on the role of the human mind and its capacity to form insights, and rejected the stimulus-response mechanism and habit-formation advocated by behaviorists. They emphasized the active mental processes governing learning rather than the passive techniques of repetition and reinforcement. Similarly, Chomskyan linguistics with its emphasis on transformational generative rules effectively questioned the hierarchical system of structural linguistics.

From an acquisitional point of view, Chomsky persuasively argued that the behavioristic approach is woefully inadequate to account for first-language development. As discussed in chapter 1, this volume, he hypothesized that a child is born with an innate ability, and using that ability, the child acquires the first language by formulating rules, testing them out, and confirming or reformulating them rather than by merely responding to the linguistic stimuli available in the environment. Language acquisition is largely a developmental process of insight formation grounded in the cognitive capacity of the human mind. Language behavior, then, is a rule-governed creative activity and not a habit-induced mechanical one. Extending the Chomskyan notion of language acquisition, sociolinguists such as Hymes pointed out that communicative capability does not merely include grammatical knowledge but also, more importantly, knowledge of sociocultural norms governing day-to-day communication. A detailed discussion of these developments and their implications for language teaching will be given in chapter 6. Suffice it to say here that the new developments cast doubts virtually on every aspect of language-centered pedagogy.

While the theoretical base of language-centered pedagogy was completely undermined by the new developments in psychology and linguistics, its classroom application did not fare any better. Both teachers and learners were losing interest in it mainly because of its failure to achieve its stated objectives. As Ellis (1990) pointed out in a review of research, "many learners found pattern practice boring . . . Even learners who were 'motivated' to

persevere found that memorizing patterns did not lead to fluent and effective communication in real-life situations” (p. 30). The theoretical as well as classroom drawbacks of language-centered pedagogy resulted in a sharp decline in its popularity.

The loss of popularity of language-centered pedagogy does not, however, mean that it has no redeeming features. Highlighting the positive aspects of the pedagogy, several reputed scholars have, for instance, suggested that

- “Language learning does involve learning individual items” (Spolsky, 1989, p. 61) just the way behaviorists advocated.
- An explicit focus on the formal properties of the language might help the learner systematically examine, understand, and organize the linguistic system of the language (Bialystok, 1988).
- Explicit teaching of forms or structures of the target language is beneficial to learners at a particular point in their acquisition of the target language (Stern, 1983).
- A manipulative, repetition-reinforcement instructional procedure may be adequate at the early stages of second and foreign language learning (Rivers, 1972).
- “There must be some aspects of language learning which have to do with habit formation” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 11).

Considering these and other positive features, Widdowson (1990) cautioned wisely that “total rejection of behaviouristic theory is no more reasonable than total acceptance” (p. 11).

Cautioning against the developing tendency to throw out the baby with the bathwater, several scholars suggested that suitable modifications should be introduced in the classroom procedures of language-centered pedagogy in order to reduce its excessive system dependence and to make it more discourse oriented. Such a change of course was well articulated by none other than Lado, one of the leading proponents of language-centered pedagogy. When asked by a leading German professional journal, more than 20 years after the publication of his seminal book on what he called the “scientific approach” to language teaching, to look back and say which basic ideas of the audiolingual approach he would no longer stress, Lado responded:

First, I do not consider necessary the verbatim memorization of dialogues. In fact, it may be more effective to allow changes in what I would call a “creative memory” mode, that is, having the students remember the context and the ideas but encouraging them to communicative needs. Second, I no longer use pattern practice out of context. Third, I no longer limit the students to the vocabulary introduced in the text. I encourage them to introduce or ask

for additional words and expressions relevant to the context. Fourth, I no longer limit myself to helping them master the language, leaving it up to them to use the language according to their needs. Finally, I give more attention to features of discourse. (Translated by and cited in Freudenstein, 1986, pp. 5–6)

#### 5.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discussed the historical, psychological, and linguistic factors that shaped the language-centered pedagogy. I also explored its theoretical principles and classroom procedures with particular reference to the audiolingual method. Being a theory-driven, systematically organized, and teacher-friendly pedagogy, language-centered pedagogy began its life well but failed to deliver on its central promise of developing effective communicative ability in the learner.

The widespread dissatisfaction with the language-centered pedagogy coupled with the new developments in the fields of psychology and linguistics ultimately motivated the search for a better method. The result is the advent of what is called communicative language teaching, which is normally treated as a prototypical example of a learner-centered pedagogy. To what extent the new pedagogy addressed the drawbacks of the one it sought to replace and to what degree it achieved its stated objectives are the focus of chapter 6.

# Learner-Centered Methods

## 6. INTRODUCTION

The theoretical principles and classroom procedures of the language-centered pedagogy we discussed in the previous chapter shaped language teaching and teacher education for nearly a quarter century. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, researchers and teachers alike became increasingly skeptical about the effectiveness of the pedagogy to realize its stated goal of fostering communicative capability in the learner. The skepticism was grounded in the growing realization that the knowledge/ability required to correctly manipulate the structures of the target language is only a part of what is involved in learning and using it.

Although several applied linguists wrote about the state of language teaching, it was perhaps Newmark's seminal paper, "How Not to Interfere With Language Learning," published in 1966, that epitomized the doubts that prevailed among language teaching professionals, and opened up new avenues of pedagogic thought. He doubted whether language learning can be additive and linear as was steadfastly maintained by language-centered pedagogists. He asserted that

if each phonological and syntactic rule, each complex of lexical features, each semantic value and stylistic nuance—in short, if each item which the linguist's analysis leads him to identify had to be acquired one at a time, proceeding from simplest to most complex, and then each had to be connected to specified stimuli or stimulus sets, the child learner would be old before he could say a single appropriate thing and the adult learner would be dead. (Newmark, 1966, p. 79)

So arguing, Newmark (1966) adopted the view that complex bits of language are learned a whole chunk at a time rather than learned as an assemblage of constituent items. He declared that language-centered pedagogy with its emphasis on sequential presentation, practice, and production of isolated linguistic items “constitutes serious interference with the language learning process” (p. 81). In making such a bold declaration, he was clearly ahead of his time. Although his provocative thoughts had to wait for full deployment until the advent of learning-centered methods (see chap. 7, this volume), they certainly highlighted the inadequacy of language-centered methods, and prompted the search for an alternative method.

The search was accelerated by a congruence of important developments in social sciences and humanities. Interestingly, almost all of the developments either occurred or became prominent in the 1960s, precisely when dissatisfaction with language-centered pedagogy was growing. As we saw in chapter 1, in linguistics, Chomsky demonstrated the generative nature of the language system and hypothesized about the innate ability of the human mind to acquire it. Halliday provided a different perspective to language, highlighting its functional properties. In sociolinguistics, Hymes proposed a theory of communicative competence incorporating socio-cultural norms governing language communication. Austin’s speech act theory elaborated on how language users perform speech acts such as requesting, informing, apologizing, and so forth. In psychology, behaviorism was yielding its preeminence to cognitivism, which believed in the role of human cognition as a mediator between stimulus and response. Sociologists were developing communication models to explain how language is used to construct social networks.

A development that was unrelated to the academic disciplines just mentioned, but one that hastened the search for an alternative method, was the formation of European Economic Community (EEC), a common market of Western European countries, a precursor to the current European Union (EU). By deliberate policy, the EEC eased trade and travel restrictions within multilingual Europe, which in turn provided an impetus for greater interaction among the people of the Western European countries and, consequently, provided a *raison d’être* for developing a function-oriented language teaching pedagogy in order to meet their specific communicative needs. In 1971, the Council of Europe, a wing of EEC, commissioned a group of European applied linguists and entrusted them with the task of designing a new way to teach foreign languages.

Learning from the shortcomings of language-centered pedagogy and drawing from the newly available psychological and linguistic insights, Wilkins, a British applied linguist who was a member of the group commissioned by the Council of Europe, proposed a set of syllabuses for language teaching. Originally published as a monograph in 1972, a revised and ex-

panded version of his proposals appeared in 1976 as a book titled *Notional Syllabuses*. Instead of merely a grammatical core, the new syllabus consisted of categories of notions such as time, sequence, quantity, location, and frequency, and categories of communicative functions such as informing, requesting, and instructing. The notional/functional syllabus, as it was known, provided a new way of exploiting the situational dialogue inherited from the past by indicating that formal and functional properties can after all be gainfully integrated. Thus began a language teaching movement which later became well-known as *communicative method* or *communicative approach* or simply *communicative language teaching*. The watchword here is, of course, communication; there will be more on this later.

It should be kept in mind that communicative language teaching is not a monolithic entity; different teachers and teacher educators offered different interpretations of the method within a set of broadly accepted theoretical principles so much so that it makes sense to talk about not one but several communicative methods. In what follows, I look at, in detail, the theoretical principles and classroom procedures associated with communicative language teaching, treating it as a prototypical example of a learner-centered pedagogy.

## 6.1. THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

The conceptual underpinnings of learner-centered pedagogy are truly multidisciplinary in the sense that its theory of language, language learning, and language teaching came not only from the feeder disciplines of linguistics and psychology, but also from anthropology and sociology as well as from other subdisciplines such as ethnography, ethnomethodology, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. The influence of all these areas of inquiry is very much reflected in the theory of language communication adopted by learner-centered pedagogists.

### 6.1.1. Theory of Language

In order to derive their theory of language, learner-centered pedagogists drew heavily from Chomskyan formal linguistics, Hallidayan functional linguistics, Hymesian sociolinguistics, and Austinian speech act theory. In chapter 1, we discussed how these developments contributed to our understanding of the nature of language. Let us briefly recall some of the salient features.

Criticizing the basic tenets of structural linguistics, Chomsky pointed out that language constitutes not a hierarchical structure of structures as viewed by structuralists, but a network of transformations. He demonstrated the inadequacy of structuralism to account for the fundamental



characteristics of language and language acquisition, particularly their creativity and uniqueness. Whereas structuralists focused on “surface” features of phonology and morphology, Chomsky was concerned with “deep” structures, and the way in which sentences are produced. Chomskyan linguistics thus fundamentally transformed the way we look at language as system. However, preoccupied narrowly with syntactic abstraction, it paid very little attention to meaning in a communicative context.

Going beyond the narrowness of syntactic abstraction, Halliday emphasized the triple macrofunctions of language—textual, interpersonal, and ideational. The textual function deals with the phonological, syntactic, and semantic signals that enable language users to understand and transmit messages. The interpersonal function deals with sociolinguistic features of language required to establish roles, relationships, and responsibilities in a communicative situation. The ideational function deals with the concepts and processes underlying natural, physical, and social phenomena. In highlighting the importance of the interplay between these three macrofunctions of language, Halliday invoked the “meaning potential” of language, that is, sets of options or alternatives that are available to the speaker–hearer.

It was this concern with communicative meaning that led Hymes to question the adequacy of the notion of grammatical competence proposed by Chomsky. Unlike Chomsky who focused on the “ideal” native speaker–hearer and an abstract body of syntactic structures, Hymes focused on the “real” speaker–hearer who operates in the concrete world of interpersonal communication. In order to operate successfully within a speech community, a person has to be not just grammatically correct but communicatively appropriate also, that is, a person has to learn what to say, how to say it, when to say it, and to whom to say it.

In addition to Hallidayan and Hymesian perspectives, learner-centered pedagogists benefited immensely from Austin’s work. As we know, he looked at language as a series of speech acts we perform rather than as a collection of linguistic items we accumulate, an idea that fitted in perfectly with the concept of *language as communication*. We use language, Austin argued, to perform a large number of speech acts: to command, to describe, to agree, to inform, to instruct, and so forth. The function of a particular speech act can be understood only when the utterance is placed in a communicative context governed by commonly shared norms of interpretation. What is crucial here is the illocutionary force, or the intended meaning, of an utterance rather than the grammatical form an utterance may take.

By basing themselves on speech-act theory and discourse analysis, and by introducing perspectives of sociolinguistics, learner-centered pedagogists attempted to get closer to the concreteness of language use. Accordingly, they operated on the basis of the following broad principles:

- Language is a system for expressing meaning;
- the linguistic structures of language reflect its functional as well as communicative import;
- basic units of language are not merely grammatical and structural, but also notional and functional;
- the central purpose of language is communication; and
- communication is based on sociocultural norms of interpretation shared by a speech community.

In short, unlike language-centered pedagogists who treated language largely as system, learner-centered pedagogists treated it both as system and as discourse, at least some of the features of the latter (cf. chap. 1, this volume).

### 6.1.2. Theory of Language Learning

Learner-centered pedagogists derived their language learning theories mainly from cognitive psychologists, who dismissed the importance given to habit formation by behaviorists, and instead focused on insight formation. They maintained that, in the context of language learning, the learner's cognitive capacity mediates between teacher input (stimulus) and learner output (response). The learner, based on the data provided, is capable of forming, testing, and confirming hypotheses, a sequence of psychological processes that ultimately contribute to language development. Thus, for cognitive psychologists, mental processes underlying response is important, not the response itself. They also believed in developmental stages of language learning and, therefore, partial learning on the part of the learner is natural and inevitable. Because of the active involvement of the learner in the learning process, only meaningful learning, not rote learning, can lead to internalization of language systems (for more details, see the section on intake processes in chap. 2, this volume).

Consistent with the theory of language just discussed, learner-centered pedagogists looked at language communication as a synthesis of textual, interpersonal, and ideational functions. These functions, according to Breen and Candlin (1980), involve the abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation, all of which are intricately interconnected with one another during communicative performance. They suggest that language learning

is most appropriately seen as communicative interaction involving all the participants in the learning and including the various material resources on which the learning is exercised. Therefore, language learning may be seen as a process which grows out of the interaction between learners, teachers, texts and activities. (p. 95)

It must not be overlooked that in foregrounding the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation, learner-centered pedagogists did not neglect the importance of grammar learning. As Widowson (2003) recently lamented, the concern for communicative function was misconstrued by some as a justification for disregarding grammar. “But such a view runs directly counter to Halliday’s concept of function where there can be no such disjunction since it has to do with semantically encoded meaning *in form*. This concept of function would lead to a renewed emphasis on grammar, not to its neglect” (p. 88, emphasis in original). As a matter of fact, learner-centered pedagogists insisted that language learning entails the development of both accuracy and fluency, where accuracy activity involves conscious learning of grammar and fluency activity focuses on communicative potential (Brumfit, 1984).

In a recent interpretation of the learning objectives of communicative language teaching, Savignon (2002, pp. 114–115) considers the five goal areas, (known as Five Cs: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities) agreed upon as National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the United States as representing a holistic, communicative approach to language learning:

- The *communication* goal area addresses the learner’s ability to use the target language to communicate thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a variety of settings;
- the *cultures* goal area addresses the learner’s understanding of how the products and practices of a culture are reflected in the language;
- the *connections* goal area addresses the necessity for learners to learn to use the language as a tool to access and process information in a diversity of contexts beyond the classroom;
- the *comparisons* goal area are designed to foster learner insight and understanding of the nature of language and culture through a comparison of the target language and culture with the languages and cultures already familiar to them; and
- the *communities* goal area describes learners’ lifelong use of the language, in communities and contexts both within and beyond the school setting itself.

These learning goals, Savignon rightly asserts, move the communicative language teaching toward a serious consideration of the discursive and sociocultural features of language use.

### 6.1.3. Theory of Language Teaching

As can be expected, learner-centered pedagogists took their pedagogic bearings from the theories of language and language learning outlined

above. Consequently, they recognized that it is the responsibility of the language teacher to help learners (a) develop the knowledge/ability necessary to manipulate the linguistic system and use it spontaneously and flexibly in order to express their intended message; (b) understand the distinction, and the connection, between the linguistic forms they have mastered and the communicative functions they need to perform; (c) develop styles and strategies required to communicate meanings as effectively as possible in concrete situations; and (d) become aware of the sociocultural norms governing the use of language appropriate to different social circumstances (Littlewood, 1981, p. 6).

In order to carry out the above responsibilities, it was argued, language teachers must foster meaningful communication in the classroom by

- Designing and using information-gap activities where when one learner in a pair-work exchange knows something the other learner does not;
- offering choice of response to the learner, that is, open-ended tasks and exercises where the learner determines what to say and how to say it;
- emphasizing contextualization rather than decontextualized drills and pattern practices;
- using authentic language as a vehicle for communication in class;
- introducing language at discursal (and not sentential) level;
- tolerating errors as a natural outcome of language development; and
- developing activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

These and other related measures recognize the importance of communicative abilities of negotiation, interpretation, and expression that are considered to be the essence of a learner-centered pedagogy.

Such recognition also entailed a reconsideration of the role played by teachers and learners in a communicative classroom. Breen and Candlin (1980) identified two main roles for the “communicative” teacher.

The first role is to facilitate the communicative process between all participants in the classroom, and between those participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an *interdependent* participant within the learning-teaching group. This latter role is closely related to the objective of the first role and it arises from it. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher: first, as an organizer of resources and as a resource himself. Second, as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities. In this role the teacher endeavors to make clear to the learners what they need to do in

order to achieve some specific activity or task, if they indicate that such guidance is necessary. (p. 99, emphasis as in original)

The learners have to take an active role too. Instead of merely repeating after the teacher or mindlessly memorizing dialogues, they have to learn to navigate the self, the learning process, and the learning objectives.

#### 6.1.4. Content Specifications

In order to meet the requirements of the learning and teaching principles they believed in, learner-centered pedagogists opted for a product-oriented syllabus design just as their language-centered counterparts did before them, but with one important distinction: Whereas the language-centered pedagogists sought to select and sequence grammatical items, learner-centered pedagogists sought to select and sequence grammatical as well as notional/functional categories of language. Besides, they put a greater premium on the communicative needs of their learners. It is, therefore, only natural that a learner-centered curriculum is expected to provide a framework for identifying, classifying, and organizing language features that are needed by the learners for their specific communicative purposes. One way of constructing a profile of the communicative needs of the learners is “to ask the question: Who is communicating with whom, why, where, when, how, at what level, about what, and in what way?” (Munby, 1978, p. 115).

The 1970s witnessed several frameworks for content specifications geared toward a learner-centered pedagogy. As mentioned earlier, Wilkins (1972) proposed a notional/functional syllabus containing an inventory of semantico-grammatical notions such as duration, frequency, quantity, dimension, and location, and communicative functions such as greeting, warning, inviting, requesting, agreeing, and disagreeing. His syllabus was further expanded by another member of the Council of Europe, van Ek (1975) who, based on a detailed needs analysis, identified the basic communicative needs of European adult learners, and produced an inventory of notions, functions and topics as well as grammatical items required to express them. Munby's (1978) book titled *Communicative Syllabus Design* contains an elaborate taxonomy of specifications of communicative functions, discourse features and textual operations along with micro- and macroplanning.

Any textbook writer or language teacher can easily draw from such inventories and taxonomies to design a syllabus that addresses the specific needs and wants of a given group of learners. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) in their well-known book, *The Functional-Notional Approach: From Theory to Practice*, provided detailed guidelines for teachers. Here is part of a sample “mini-curriculum” adapted from their work:

<i>Title and Function</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Communicative Expressions</i>	<i>Structures</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Verbs</i>	<i>Adj.</i>	<i>Adv.</i>	<i>Structure Words</i>	<i>Activities</i>
Apologizing	Theater (asking someone to change seats)	Excuse me. Would you mind . . . ? I'm very grateful.	V + <i>ing</i>	seat place friend	move change				Dialogue study Roleplay Paired practice
Apologizing	Department store (Returning something)	I'm sorry. Would it be possible . . . ?	Simple past Present perfect	shirt	buy wear	small	too	you	Aural comprehension Indirect speech
Requesting directions	At the bus stop	I beg your pardon. Could you tell me . . . ?	Interrogatives (simple present) Modal <i>must</i>	names of places	must get to get off take		how where	us	Reading Questions and answers Cloze procedure Dictation

(Adapted from Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, p. 38)

The sample units make it clear to the teacher and the learner what communicative function (e.g., apologizing) is highlighted and in what context (e.g., theater, store, etc.) as well as what grammatical structures/items and vocabulary are needed to carry out the function. They also indicate to the teacher possible classroom activities that can be profitably employed to realize the learning and teaching objectives.

The focus on the learner's communicative needs, which is the hallmark of a learner-centered pedagogy, has positive as well as problematic aspects to it. There is no doubt that identifying and meeting the language needs of specific groups of learners will be of great assistance in creating and sustaining learner motivation, and in making the entire learning/teaching operation a worthwhile endeavor. Besides, a need-based, learner-centered curriculum will give the classroom teachers a clear pathway to follow in their effort to maximize learning opportunities for their learners. Such a curriculum easily facilitates the designing of specific purpose courses geared to the needs of groups of learners having the same needs (such as office secretaries, air traffic controllers, lawyers, or engineers). However, as Johnson (1982) correctly pointed out, if we are dealing with, as we most often do, groups of learners each of whom wishes to use the language for different purposes, then, it may be difficult to derive a manageable list of notions and functions. The Council of Europe attempted to tackle this practical problem by identifying a "common core" of functions such as greeting, introducing, inviting, and so forth associated with the general area of social life alongside other specialized, work-related units meant for specific groups of learners.

Yet another serious concern about specifying the content for a learner-centered class is that there are no criteria for selecting and sequencing language input to the learner. Johnson (1982), for instance, raised a few possibilities and dismissed all of them as inadequate. The criterion of simplicity, which was widely followed by language-centered pedagogists, is of little use here because whether a communicative function or a speech act is simple or complex does not depend on the grammatical and discoursal features of a function but on the purpose and context of communication. A second possible criterion—priority of needs—is equally problematic because, as Johnson (1982) observed, "questions like 'Do the students need to learn how to *apologize* before learning how to *interrupt*?' have no clear answer" (p. 71). Practical difficulties such as these notwithstanding, the learner-centered syllabus provided a clear statement of learning/teaching objectives for classroom teachers to pursue in their classroom.

## 6.2. CLASSROOM PROCEDURES

The content specifications of learner-centered pedagogy are a clear and qualitative extension of those pertaining to language-centered pedagogy, an extension that can make a huge difference in the instructional design.

But, from a classroom procedural point of view, there is no *fundamental* difference between language-centered pedagogy and learner-centered pedagogy. The rationale behind this rather brisk observation will become apparent as we take a closer look at the input modifications and interactional activities recommended by learner-centered pedagogists.

### 6.2.1. Input Modifications

Unlike the language-centered pedagogist, who adopted an almost exclusive form-based approach to input modifications, learner-centered pedagogists pursued a form- and meaning-based approach. Recognizing that successful communication entails more than structures, they attempted to connect form and meaning. In a sense, this connection is indeed the underlying practice of any method of language teaching for, as Brumfit and Johnson (1979) correctly pointed out,

no teacher introduces “shall” and “will” (for example) without relating the structure implicitly or explicitly to a conceptual meaning, usually that of futurity; nor would we teach (or be able to teach) the English article system without recourse to the concepts of countableness and uncountableness. (p. 1)

What learner-centered pedagogists did, and did successfully, was to make this connection explicit at the levels of syllabus design, textbook production, and classroom input and interaction. Notice how, for example, the minicurriculum cited (section 6.1.4) focuses on the communicative function of “apologizing,” while at the same time, identifying grammatical structures and vocabulary items needed to perform that function.

In trying to make the form-function connection explicit, language-centered pedagogists assumed that contextual meaning can be analyzed sufficiently and language input can be modified suitably so as to present the learner with a useable and useful set of form- and meaning-based learning materials. Such an assumption would have been beneficial if there is a one-to-one correspondence between grammatical forms and communicative functions. We know that a single form can express several functions just as a single function can be expressed through several forms. To use an example given by Littlewood (1981)

the speaker who wants somebody to close the door has many linguistic options, including “Close the door, please,” “Could you please close the door?,” “Would you mind closing the door?,” or “Excuse me, could I trouble you to close the door?” Some forms might only perform this directive function in the context of certain social relationships—for example, “You’ve left the door open!” could serve as a directive from teacher to pupil, but not from teacher to principal. Other forms would depend strongly on shared situational knowl-



edge for their correct interpretation, and could easily be misunderstood (e.g. “Brrr! It’s cold, isn’t it?”). (p. 2)

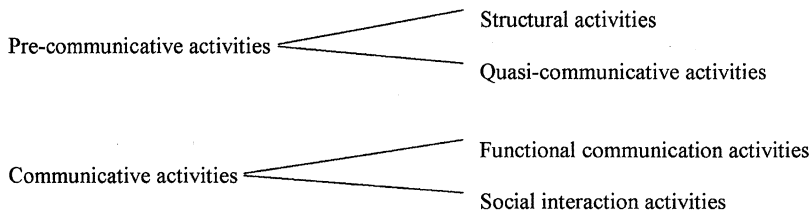
Similarly, a single expression, “I’ve got a headache” can perform the functions of a warning, a request, or an apology depending on the communicative context.

Language input in learner-centered pedagogy, then, can only provide the learner with standardized functions embedded in stereotypical contexts. It is almost impossible to present language functions in a wide range of contexts in which they usually occur. It is, therefore, left to the learner to figure out how the sample utterances are actually realized and reformulated to meet interpretive norms governing effective communication in a given situation. Whether the learner is able to meet this challenge or not depends to a large extent on the way in which interactional activities are carried out in the classroom.

### 6.2.2. Interactional Activities

To operationalize their input modifications in the classroom, learner-centered pedagogists followed the same presentation–practice–production sequence popularized by language-centered pedagogists but with one important distinction: Whereas the language-centered pedagogists presented and helped learners practice and produce grammatical items, learner-centered pedagogists presented and helped learners practice and produce grammatical as well as notional/functional categories of language. It must, however, be acknowledged that learner-centered pedagogists came out with a wide variety of innovative classroom procedures such as pair work, group work, role-play, simulation games, scenarios and debates that ensured a communicative flavor to their interactional activities.

One of the sources of communicative activities widely used by English language teachers during the 1980s is *Communicative Language Teaching—An Introduction*, by Littlewood (1981). In it, he presents what he calls a “methodological framework,” consisting of precommunicative activities and communicative activities diagrammatically represented as



Stating that these categories and subcategories represent differences of emphasis and orientation rather than distinct divisions, Littlewood explains that through precommunicative activities, the teacher provides the learners with specific knowledge of linguistic forms, and gives them opportunities to practice. Through communicative activities, the learner is helped to activate and integrate those forms for meaningful communication. The teacher also provides corrective feedback at all stages of activities, because error correction, unlike in the language-centered pedagogy, is not frowned upon.

Littlewood suggests several classroom activities that are typical of a learner-centered pedagogy. For example, consider the following activity:

*Discovering Missing Information*

Learner A has information represented in tabular form. For example, he may have a table showing distances between various towns or a football league table showing a summary of each team's results so far (how many games they have played/won/lost/drawn, how many goals they have scored, etc.). However, some items of information have been deleted from the table. Learner B has an identical table except that different items of information have been deleted. Each learner can therefore complete his own tale by asking his partner for the information that he lacks.

As with several previous activities, the teacher may (if he wishes) specify what language forms are to be used. For example, the distances table would require forms such as "How far is . . . from . . . ?" "Which town is . . . miles from . . . ?," while the league table would require forms such as "How many games have . . . played?" and "How many goals have . . . scored?."

(Littlewood, 1981, p. 26)

And another:

*Pooling Information to Solve a Problem*

Learner A has a train timetable showing the times of trains from X to Y. Learner B has a timetable of trains from Y to Z. For example:

*Learner A's information:*

Newtown dep.	:	11.34	13.31	15.18	16.45
Shrewsbury arr.	:	12.22	14.18	16.08	18.25

*Learner B's information:*

Shrewsbury dep.	:	13.02	15.41	16.39	18.46
Swansea arr.	:	17.02	19.19	20.37	22.32

Together, the learners must work out the quickest possible journey from Newtown to Swansea. Again, of course, it is important that they should not be able to *see* each other's information.

(Littlewood, 1981, pp. 34–35)

These two examples illustrate functional communication activities. The idea behind them is that “the teacher structures the situation so that learners have to overcome an information gap or solve a problem. Both the stimulus for communication and the yardstick for success are thus contained within the situation itself: learners must work towards a definite solution or decision” (Littlewood, 1981, p. 22). The activities are intended to help the learner find the language necessary to convey an intended message effectively in a specific context. The two sample activities show how two learners in a paired-activity are required to interact with each other, ask questions, seek information, and pool the information together in order to carry out the activities successfully.

Social interaction activities focus on an additional dimension of language use. They require that learners take into consideration the social meaning as well as the functional meaning of different language forms. Consider the following activities:

*Role Playing Controlled Through Cues and Information*

Two learners play the roles of a prospective guest at a hotel and the hotel manager.

*Student A:* You arrive at a small hotel one evening. In the foyer, you meet the manager(ess) and:

Ask if there is a room vacant.

Ask the price, including breakfast.

Say how many nights you would like to stay.

Ask where you can park your car for the night.

Say what time you would like to have breakfast.

*Student B:* You are the manager(ess) of a small hotel that prides itself on its friendly atmosphere. You have a single and a double room vacant for tonight. The prices are: £8.50 for the single room, £15.00 for the double room. Breakfast is £1.50 extra per person. In the street behind the hotel, there is a free car park. Guests can have tea in bed in the morning, for 50p.

(Littlewood, 1981, pp. 52–53)

As Littlewood (1981) explains,

the main structure for the interaction now comes from learner A's cues. A can thus introduce variations and additions without throwing B into confusion. For the most part, B's role requires him to respond rather than initiate, though he may also introduce topics himself (e.g. by asking whether A would like tea). (p. 53)

In carrying out this social interaction activity, learners have to pay greater attention to communication as a social behavior, as the activity approximates a communicative situation the learners may encounter outside the classroom. The focus here is not just formal and functional effectiveness, but also social appropriateness.

As these examples indicate, classroom procedures of learner-centered pedagogy are largely woven around the sharing of information and the negotiation of meaning. This is true not only of oral communication activities, but also of reading and writing activities. Information-gap activities, which have the potential to carry elements of unpredictability, freedom of choice, and appropriate use of language, were found to be useful and relevant. So were role-plays, which are supposed to help the learners get ready for the "real world" communication outside the classroom. One of the challenges facing the classroom teacher, then, is to prepare the learners to make the connection between sample interactions practiced in the classroom and the communicative demands outside the classroom. Whether this transfer from classroom communication to "real world" communication can be achieved or not depends to a large extent on the role played by the teachers as well as the learners.

To sum up this section and to put it in the framework of the three types of interactional activities discussed in chapter 3, learner-centered pedagogists fully endorsed interaction as a textual activity by emphasizing form-based activities, that is, by encouraging conscious attention to the formal properties of the language. They also facilitated interaction as an interpersonal activity by opting for meaning-based activities, by attempting to make

the connection between form and function explicit, and by helping the learner establish social relationships in the classroom through collaborative pair and group work. To a limited extent, they promoted interaction as an ideational activity, which focuses on the learner's social awareness and identity formation by encouraging learners at the higher levels of proficiency to share with others their life experiences outside the classroom and by organizing activities such as debates on current affairs. The degree to which the objectives of these types of activities were fully realized is bound to vary from class to class and from context to context.

### 6.3. A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Perhaps the greatest achievement of learner-centered pedagogists is that they successfully directed the attention of the language-teaching profession to aspects of language other than grammatical structures. By treating language as discourse, not merely as system, they tried to move classroom teaching away from a largely systemic orientation that relied upon a mechanical rendering of pattern practices and more toward a largely communicative orientation that relied upon a partial simulation of meaningful exchanges that take place outside the classroom. By considering the characteristics of language communication with all earnestness, they bestowed legitimacy to the basic concepts of negotiation, interpretation, and expression. They highlighted the fact that language is a means of conveying and receiving ideas and information as well as a tool for expressing personal needs, wants, beliefs, and desires. They also underscored the creative, unpredictable, and purposeful character of language communication.

Of course, the nature of communication that learner-centered pedagogists assiduously espoused is nothing new. It has long been practiced in other disciplines in social sciences such as communication studies. But what is noteworthy is that learner-centered pedagogists explored and exploited it seriously and systematically for the specific purpose of learning and teaching second and foreign languages. It is to their credit that, although being critical of language-centered pedagogy, they did not do away with its explicit focus on grammar but actually extended it to include functional features as well. In doing so, they anticipated some of the later research findings in second-language acquisition, which generally supported the view that

form-focused instruction and corrective feedback provided within the context of a communicative program are more effective in promoting second language learning than programs which are limited to an exclusive emphasis on accuracy on the one hand or an exclusive emphasis on fluency on the other. (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p. 105)

The explicit focus on grammar is not the only teaching principle that learner-centered pedagogists retained from the discredited tradition of audiolingualism. They also retained, this time to ill-effect, its cardinal belief in a linear and additive way of language learning as well as its presentation–practice–production sequence of language teaching. In spite of their interest in the cognitive–psychological principles of holistic learning, learner-centered pedagogists preselected and presequenced grammatical, lexical, and functional items, and presented to the learners one cluster of items at a time hoping that the learners would learn the discrete items in a linear and additive manner, and then put them together in some logical fashion in order get at the totality of the language as communication. As Widdowson (2003) recently reiterated,

although there are differences of view about the language learning process, there is a general acceptance that whatever else it might be, it is not simply additive. The acquisition of competence is not accumulative but adaptive: learners proceed not by adding items of knowledge or ability, but by a process of continual revision and reconstruction. In other words, learning is necessarily a process of recurrent unlearning and relearning, whereby encoding rules and conventions for their use are modified, extended, realigned, or abandoned altogether to accommodate new language data.” (pp. 140–141)

As mentioned earlier, and it is worth repeating, from a classroom methodological point of view, there are no *fundamental* differences between language-centered and learning-centered pedagogies. They adhere to different versions of the familiar linear and additive view of language learning and the equally familiar presentation–practice–production vision of language teaching. For some, this is too difficult and disappointing an interpretation to digest because for a considerable length of time, it has been propagated with almost evangelical zeal and clock-work regularity that communicative language teaching marked a revolutionary step in the methodological aspects of language teaching. The term, *communicative revolution*, one often comes across in the professional literature is clearly an overstatement. Those who make such a claim do so based more on the array of innovative classroom procedures recommended to be followed in the communicative classroom (and they indeed are innovative and impressive) than on their conceptual underpinnings.

I use the phrase, “recommended to be followed,” advisedly because a communicative learning/teaching agenda, however well-conceived, cannot by itself guarantee a communicative classroom because communication “is what may or may not be achieved through classroom activity; it cannot be embodied in an abstract specification” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 130). Data-

based classroom-oriented investigations conducted in various contexts by various researchers such as Kumaravadivelu (1993a), Legutke and Thomas (1991), Nunan (1987), and Thornbury (1996) revealed without any doubt that the so-called communicative classrooms are anything but communicative. Nunan observed that, in the classes he studied, form was more prominent in that function and grammatical accuracy activities dominated communicative fluency ones. He concluded, "there is growing evidence that, in communicative class, interactions may, in fact, not be very communicative after all" (p. 144). Legutke and Thomas (1991) were even more forthright: "In spite of trendy jargon in textbooks and teachers' manuals, very little is actually communicated in the L2 classroom. The way it is structured does not seem to stimulate the wish of learners to say something, nor does it tap what they might have to say . . ." (pp. 8–9). My research confirmed these findings, when I analyzed lessons taught by those claiming to follow communicative language teaching, and reached the conclusion: "Even teachers who are committed to CLT can fail to create opportunities for genuine interaction in their classroom" (Kumaravadivelu, 1993a, p. 113).

Yet another serious drawback that deserves mention is what Swan (1985) dubbed the "tabula rasa attitude" of the learner-centered pedagogists. That is, they firmly and falsely believed that adult L2 learners do not possess normal pragmatic skills, nor can they transfer them, from their mother tongue. They summarily dismissed the L1 pragmatic knowledge/ability L2 learners bring with them to the L2 classroom. Swan (1985) draws attention to the fact that adult second-language learners know how to negotiate meaning, convey information, and perform speech acts. "What they do not know" he declares rightly, "is what words are used to do it in a foreign language. They need lexical items, not skills . . ." (p. 9). In other words, L2 learners, by virtue of being members of their L1 speech community, know the basic rules of communicative use. All we need to do is to tap the linguistic and cultural resources they bring with them. This view has been very well supported by research. Summarizing nearly two decades of studies on pragmatics in second language learning and teaching, Rose and Kasper (2001) stated unequivocally, "adult learners get a considerable amount of L2 pragmatic knowledge for free. This is because some pragmatic knowledge is universal . . . and other aspects may be successfully transferred from the learners' L1" (p. 4). In a similar vein, focusing generally on the nonuse of L1 in the L2 classroom, Vivian Cook (2002) has all along questioned the belief that learners would fare better if they kept to the second language, and has recently recommended that teachers "develop the systematic use of the L1 in the classroom alongside the L2 as a reflection of the realities of the classroom situation, as an aid to learning and as a model for the world outside" (p. 332).

## 6.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical principles and classroom procedures of learner-centered pedagogy with particular reference to communicative language teaching. By citing extensively from the works of Finnochiaro and Brumfit, and Littlewood, I have tried to illustrate the pedagogy both from its earlier and its later versions. It is apparent that by focusing on language as discourse in addition to language as system, learner-centered pedagogists made a significant contribution to furthering the cause of principled language teaching. It is also clear that they introduced highly innovative classroom procedures aimed at creating and sustaining learner motivation. The focus on the learner and the emphasis on communication have certainly made the pedagogy very popular, particularly among language teachers around the world, some of whom take pride in calling themselves “communicative language teachers.”

The popularity of the learner-centered pedagogy started fading at least among a section of the opinion makers of the profession when it became more and more clear that, partly because of its linear and additive view of language learning and its presentation–practice–production sequence of language teaching, it has not been significantly different from or demonstrably better than the language-centered pedagogy it sought to replace. Swan (1985) summed up the sentiments prevailed among certain quarters of the profession, thus:

If one reads through the standard books and articles on the communicative teaching of English, one finds assertions about language use and language learning falling like leaves in autumn; facts, on the other hand, tend to be remarkably thin on the ground. Along with its many virtues, the Communicative Approach unfortunately has most of the typical vices of an intellectual revolution: it over-generalizes valid but limited insights until they become virtually meaningless; it makes exaggerated claims for the power and novelty of its doctrines; it misrepresents the currents of thought it has replaced; it is often characterized by serious intellectual confusion; it is choked with jargon. (p. 2)

These and other valid criticisms resulted in a disillusionment that eventually opened the door for a radical refinement of communicative language teaching, one that focused more on the psycholinguistic processes of learning rather than the pedagogic products of teaching. This resulted in what was called a “strong” or a “process-oriented” version of communicative language teaching. The original “weak” version merely tinkers with the traditional language-centered pedagogy by incorporating a much-needed communicative component into it, whereas the “strong” version “advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not



merely the question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. If the former could be described as 'learning to use' English, the latter entails 'using English to learn it'" (Howatt, 1984, p. 279).

But, such a "strong" version has to be so radically different both in theory and in practice that it would lead to terminological and conceptual confusion to continue to call it *communicative* method or *learner-centered* pedagogy. A more apt description would be *learning-centered* pedagogy, to which we turn next.

# Learning-Centered Methods

## 7. INTRODUCTION

In chapter 5 and chapter 6, we learned how language- and learner-centered methods are anchored primarily in the linguistic properties of the target language, the former on formal properties and the latter on formal as well as functional properties. We also learned that they both share a fundamental similarity in classroom methodological procedures: presentation, practice, and production of those properties. In other words, they are grounded on the linguistic properties underlying the target language rather than on the learning processes underlying L2 development. This is understandable partly because, unlike the advocates of learning-centered methods, those of language- and learner-centered methods did not have the full benefit of nearly a quarter century of sustained research in the psycholinguistic processes of L2 development. Studies on intake factors and intake processes governing L2 development (cf. chap. 2, this volume), in spite of their conceptual and methodological limitations, have certainly provided a fast-expanding site on which the edifice of a process-based method could be constructed.

During the 1980s, several scholars experimented with various process-oriented approaches to language teaching. These approaches include: comprehension approach (Winitz, 1981), natural approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), proficiency-oriented approach (Omaggio, 1986), communicational approach (Prabhu, 1987), lexical approach (Lewis, 1993; Willis, 1990) and process approach (Legutke & Thomas, 1991). In addition, there is a host of other local projects that are little known and less recognized

(see Hamilton, 1996, for some). All these attempts indicate a rare convergence of ideas and interests in as wide a geographical area and as varied a pedagogical context as North America, Western Europe and South Asia. In this chapter, I focus on two learning-centered methods, mainly because both of them have been widely recognized and reviewed in the L2 literature: the Natural Approach, and the Communicational Approach.

The Natural Approach (NA) was originally proposed by Terrell at the University of California at Irvine initially for teaching beginning level Spanish for adult learners in the United States. It was later developed fully by combining the practical experience gained by Terrell and the theoretical constructs of the Monitor Model of second language acquisition proposed by Krashen, an applied linguist at the University of Southern California. The principles and procedures of the approach have been well articulated in Krashen and Terrell (1983). In addition, Brown and Palmer (1988) developed language specifications and instructional materials for applying Krashen's theory. The NA is premised on the belief that a language is best acquired when the learner's focus is not directly on the language.

The Communicational Approach, very much like the NA, is based on the belief that grammar construction can take place in the absence of any explicit focus on linguistic features. It was developed through a long-term project initiated and directed by Prabhu, who was an English Studies Specialist at the British Council, South India. Reviews of the project that have appeared in the literature call it the Bangalore Project (referring to the place of its origin), or the Procedural Syllabus (referring to the nature of its syllabus), but the project team itself used the name Communicational Teaching Project (CTP). The need for the project arose from a widespread dissatisfaction with a version of language-centered pedagogy followed in Indian schools. It was also felt that the learner-centered pedagogy with its emphasis on situational appropriacy might not be relevant for a context where English is taught and learned more for academic and administrative reasons than for social interactional purposes. The project was carried out for 5 years (1979–1984) in large classes in South India (30 to 45 students per class in primary schools, and 40 to 60 students per class in secondary schools). Few classes used teaching aids beyond the chalkboard, paper, and pencil. Toward the end of the project period and at the invitation of the project team, a group of program evaluators from the University of Edinburgh, U.K. evaluated the efficacy of the approach (see, e.g., Beretta & Davies, 1985). Thus, among the known learning-centered methods, the CTP is perhaps the only one that enjoys the benefits of a sustained systematic investigation as well as a formal external evaluation.

In the following sections of this chapter, I take a critical look at the theoretical principles and classroom procedures associated with learning-centered methods with particular reference to the NA and the CTP.

## 7.1. THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

The theoretical foundations of learning-centered pedagogy are guided by the theory of language, language learning, language teaching, and curricular specifications that the proponents of the pedagogy deemed appropriate for constructing a new pedagogy.

### 7.1.1. Theory of Language

Although learning-centered pedagogists have not explicitly spelled out any specific theory of language that governs their pedagogy, their principles and procedures imply the same theory that informs the learner-centered pedagogy (see chap. 6, this volume, for details). They have drawn heavily from the Chomskyan cognitive perspective on language learning, and from the Hallidayan functional perspective on language use. They particularly owe a debt to Halliday's concept of *learning to mean* and his observation that language is learned only in relation to use. They have, however, been very selective in applying the Hallidayan perspective. For instance, they have emphasized the primacy of meaning and lexicon while, unlike Halliday, minimizing the importance of grammar. There is also an important difference between the NA and the CTP in terms of the theory of language: while the NA values sociocultural aspects of pragmatic knowledge, the CTP devalues them. The reason is simple: unlike the NA, the CTP is concerned with developing linguistic knowledge/ability that can be used for academic purposes rather than developing pragmatic knowledge/ability that can be used for social interaction.

### 7.1.2. Theory of Language Learning

Both the NA and the CTP share a well-articulated theory of language learning partially supported by research in L2 development. They both believe that L2 grammar construction can take place incidentally, that is, even when the learners' conscious attention is not brought to bear on the grammatical system. There is, however, a subtle difference in their approach to language learning. The NA treats L2 grammar construction as *largely* incidental. That is, it does not rule out a restricted role for explicit focus on grammar as part of an institutionalized language learning/teaching program or as part of homework given to the learner. The CTP, however, treats L2 grammar construction as *exclusively* incidental. That is, it rules out any role for explicit focus on grammar even in formal contexts. In spite of this difference, as we shall see, there are more similarities than differences between the two in terms of their theoretical principles and classroom procedures.

The language learning theory of learning-centered pedagogy rests on the following four basic premises:

1. Language development is incidental, not intentional.
2. Language development is meaning focused, not form focused.
3. Language development is comprehension based, not production based.
4. Language development is cyclical and parallel, not sequential and additive.

I briefly discuss each of these premises below, highlighting the extent to which the NA and the CTP converge or diverge.

*Language development is incidental, not intentional.* In the context of L2 development, the process of incidental learning involves the picking up of words and structures, “simply by engaging in a variety of communicative activities, in particular reading and listening activities, during which the learner’s attention is focused on the meaning rather than on the form of language” (Hulstijn, 2003, p. 349). The incidental nature of language development has long been a subject of interest to scholars. As early as in the 17th century, philosopher Locke (1693) anticipated the basic principles of learning-centered methods when he said:

learning how to speak a language . . . is an intuitive process for which human beings have a natural capacity that can be awakened provided only that the proper conditions exist. Put simply, there are three such conditions: someone to talk to, something to talk about, and a desire to understand and make yourself understood. (cited in Howatt, 1984, p. 192)

Much later, Palmer (1921) argued that (a) in learning a second language, we learn without knowing that we are learning; and (b) the utilization of the adult learner’s conscious attention on language militates against the proper functioning of the natural capacities of language development.

Krashen has put forth similar arguments in three of his hypotheses that form part of his Monitor Model of second-language acquisition. His input hypothesis states “humans acquire language in only one way—by understanding messages, or by receiving comprehensible input. . . . If input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided” (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). His acquisition/learning hypothesis states that adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing L2 knowledge/ability. One way is *acquisition*, a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop their knowledge/ability in the first language. It is a subconscious process. Acquisition, therefore, is “picking-up” a language incidentally. Another way is *learning*. It refers to conscious knowledge of an

L2, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. Learning, therefore, is developing language knowledge/ability intentionally. His monitor hypothesis posits that acquisition and learning are used in very specific ways. Acquisition “initiates” our utterances in L2 and is responsible for our fluency. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been “produced” by the acquired system. Together, the three hypotheses claim that incidental learning is what counts in the development of L2 knowledge/ability. It must, however, be noted that Krashen does not completely rule out intentional learning which, he believes, may play a marginal role.

Unlike Krashen, Prabhu claims that language development is exclusively incidental. He dismisses any explicit teaching of descriptive grammar to learners, not even for monitor use as advocated by Krashen. He rightly points out that the sequence and the substance of grammar that is exposed to the learners through systematic instruction may not be the same as the learners’ mental representation of it. He, therefore, sees no reason why any structure or vocabulary has to be consciously presented by the teacher or practiced by the learner. The CTP operates under the assumption that

while the conscious mind is working out some of the meaning-content, a sub-conscious part of the mind perceives, abstracts, or acquires (or recreates, as a cognitive structure) some of the linguistic structuring embodied in those entities, as a step in the development of an internal system of rules. (Prabhu, 1987, pp. 69–70)

The extent to which learning-centered pedagogists emphasize incidental learning is only partially supported by research on L2 learning and teaching. As discussed in chapter 2 and chapter 3, research makes it amply clear that learners need to pay conscious attention to, and notice the linguistic properties of, the language as well. It has been argued that there can be no L2 learning without attention and noticing although it is possible that learners may learn one thing when their primary objective is to do something else (Schmidt, 1993). As Hulstijn (2003) concluded in a recent review,

on the one hand, both incidental and intentional learning require some attention and noticing. On the other hand, however, attention is deliberately directed to committing new information to memory in the case of intentional learning, whereas the involvement of attention is not deliberately geared toward an articulated learning goal in the case of incidental learning. (p. 361)

*Language development is meaning focused, not form focused.* Closely linked to the principle of incidental learning is the emphasis placed by learning-centered methods on meaning-focused activities. This principle, which is in

fact the cornerstone of learning-centered methods, holds that L2 development is not a matter of accumulation and assimilation of phonological, syntactic and semantic features of the target language, but a matter of understanding the language input "where 'understand' means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message" (Krashen, 1982, p. 21). Learning-centered pedagogists point out the futility of focusing on form by arguing that

the internal system developed by successful learners is far more complex than any grammar yet constructed by a linguist, and it is, therefore, unreasonable to suppose that any language learner can acquire a deployable internal system by consciously understanding and assimilating the rules in a linguist's grammar, not to mention those in a pedagogic grammar which represent a simplification of the linguist's grammars and consequently can only be still further removed from the internally developed system. (Prabhu, 1987, p. 72)

These statements clearly echo an earlier argument by Newmark (1966) that "the study of grammar as such is neither necessary nor sufficient for learning to use a language" (p. 77).

The emphasis on an exclusively meaning-focused activity ignores the crucial role played by language awareness (see section 2.3.5 on knowledge factors) and several other intake factors and intake processes in L2 development. What is more, it even ignores the active role played by learners themselves in their own learning effort (see section 2.3.3 on tactical factors). Even if the textbook writer or the classroom teacher provides modified input that makes meaning salient, it is up to the learner to recognize or not to recognize it as such. As Snow (1987) perceptively observed, what learners have in mind when they are asked to do meaning-focused activities is more important than what is in the mind of the teacher. She goes on to argue, "learners might be doing a good deal of private, intra-cerebral work to make sense of, analyze, and remember the input, thus in fact imposing considerable intentional learning on a context that from the outside looks as if it might generate mostly incidental learning" (p. 4).

Snow's observations are quite revealing because, during the course of the CTP project, Prabhu (1987) had seen that

individual learners became suddenly preoccupied, for a moment, with some piece of language, in ways apparently unrelated to any immediate demands of the on-going activity in the classroom. . . . It is possible to speculate whether such moments of involuntary language awareness might be symptoms (or "surfacing") of some internal process of learning, representing, for instance, a conflict in the emerging internal system leading to system revision. (p. 76)

What Prabhu describes may perhaps be seen as one indication of learners doing the kind of private, intracerebral work to which Snow alerted us.

Prabhu (1987) counters such learner behavior by arguing that “if the instances of involuntary awareness are symptoms of some learning process, any attempt to increase or influence them directly would be effort misdirected to symptoms, rather than to causes” (p. 77). This argument, of course, assumes that any “involuntary language awareness” on the part of the learner is only a symptom and not a cause. Our current state of knowledge is too inadequate to support or reject this assumption.

*Language development is comprehension based, not production based.* It makes sense empirically as well as intuitively to emphasize comprehension over production at least in the initial stages of L2 development. Comprehension, according to several scholars (see Krashen, 1982; Winitz, 1981, for earlier reports; Gass, 1997; van Patten, 1996, for later reviews), has cognitive, affective, and communicative advantages. Cognitively, they point out, it is better to concentrate on one skill at a time. Affectively, a major handicap for some learners is that speaking in public, using their still-developing L2, embarrasses or frightens them; they should therefore have to speak only when they feel ready to do so. Communicatively, listening is inherently interactive in that the listeners try to work out a message from what they hear; speaking can be, at least in the initial stages, no more than parrotlike repetitions or manipulations of a cluster of phonological features.

Learning-centered pedagogists believe that comprehension helps learners firm up abstract linguistic structures needed for the establishment of mental representations of the L2 system (see Section 2.4 on intake processes). Prabhu (1987, pp. 78–80), lists four factors to explain the importance of comprehension over production in L2 development:

- Unlike production, which involves public display of language causing a sense of insecurity or anxiety in the learner, comprehension involves only a safe, private activity;
- unlike production, which involves creating and supporting new language samples on the part of the learner, comprehension involves language features that are already present in the input addressed to the learner;
- unlike production, which demands some degree of verbal accuracy and communicative appropriacy, comprehension allows the learner to be imprecise, leaving future occasions to make greater precision possible;
- unlike production, over which the learner may not have full control, comprehension is controlled by the learner and is readily adjustable.

Prabhu also points out that learners can draw on extralinguistic resources, such as knowledge of the world and contextual expectations, in order to comprehend.



Learning-centered pedagogists also believe that once comprehension is achieved, the knowledge/ability to speak or write fluently will automatically emerge. In accordance with this belief, they allow production to emerge gradually in several stages. These stages typically consist of (a) response by nonverbal communication; (b) response with single words such as *yes, no, there, OK, you, me, house, run, and come*; (c) combinations of two or three words such as *paper on table, me no go, where book, and don't go*; (d) phrases such as *I want to stay, where you going, boy running*; (e) sentences; and finally (f) more complex discourse (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Because of their emphasis on comprehension, learning-centered pedagogists minimize the importance of learner output. Krashen (1981) goes to the extent of arguing that, in the context of subconscious language acquisition, “theoretically, speaking and writing are not essential to acquisition. One can acquire ‘competence’ in a second language, or a first language, without ever producing it” (pp. 107–108). In the context of conscious language learning, he believes that “output can play a fairly direct role . . . although even here it is not necessary” (1982, p. 61). He has further pointed out that learner production “is too scarce to make a real contribution to linguistic competence” (Krashen, 1998, p. 180). The emphasis learning-centered methods place on comprehension, however, ignores the role of learner output in L2 development. We learned from Swain’s comprehensible output hypothesis and Schmidt’s auto-input hypothesis that learner production, however meager it is, is an important link in the input–intake–output chain (see chap. 2 and chap. 3, this volume).

*Language development is cyclical and parallel, not sequential and additive.* Learning-centered pedagogists believe that the development of L2 knowledge/ability is not a linear, discrete, additive process but a cyclical, holistic process consisting of several transitional and parallel systems—a view that is, as we discussed in chapter 2, quite consistent with recent research in SLA. Accordingly, they reject the notion of linearity and systematicity as used in the language- and learner-centered pedagogies. According to them linearity and systematicity involve two false assumptions: “an assumption of isomorphism between the descriptive grammar used and the internal system, and an assumption of correspondence between the grammatical progression used in the teaching and the developmental sequence of the internal system” (Prabhu, 1987, p. 73). These assumptions require, as Widdowson (1990) observed, reliable information “about cognitive development at different stages of maturation, about the conditions, psychological and social, which attend the emergence in the mind of general problem-solving capabilities” (p. 147). Such information is not yet available.

In fact, the natural-order hypothesis proposed by Krashen as part of his Monitor Model states that the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order. Based on this claim, Krashen originally advo-

cated adherence to what he called *natural order sequence*, but has softened his position saying that the natural order hypothesis “does not state that every acquirer will acquire grammatical structures in the exact same order” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 28). Learners may tend to develop certain structures early and certain other structures late. In other words, learner performance sequence need not be the same as language learning sequence, and the learning sequence may not be the same as teaching sequence. Therefore, any preplanned progression of instructional sequence is bound to be counterproductive. In this respect, learning-centered pedagogists share the view expressed earlier by Newmark and Reibel (1968): “an adult can effectively be taught by grammatically unordered materials” and that such an approach is, indeed, “the only learning process which we know for certain will produce mastery of the language at a native level” (p. 153).

### 7.1.3. Theory of Language Teaching

In accordance with their theory of L2 development, learning-centered pedagogists assert that “language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 55). Accordingly, their pedagogic agenda centers around what the teacher can do in order to keep the learners’ attention on informational content rather than on the linguistic form. Their theory of language teaching is predominantly teacher-fronted, and therefore best characterized in terms of teacher activity in the classroom:

1. The teacher follows meaning-focused activities.
2. The teacher provides comprehensible input.
3. The teacher integrates language skills.
4. The teacher makes incidental correction.

Let us briefly outline each of the four.

*The teacher follows meaning-focused activities.* In keeping with the principle of incidental learning, learning-centered pedagogy advocates meaning-focused activities where the learner’s attention is focused on communicative activities and problem-solving tasks, and not on grammatical exercises. Instruction is seen as an instrument to promote the learner’s ability to understand and say something. Interaction is seen as a meaning-focused activity directed by the teacher. Language use is contingent upon task completion and the meaning exchange required for such a purpose. Any attention to language forms as such is necessarily incidental to communication. In the absence of any explicit focus on grammar, vocabulary gains importance because with more vocabulary, there will be more compre-

hension and with more comprehension, there will be, hopefully, more language development.

*The teacher provides comprehensible input.* In order to carry out meaning-focused activities, it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide comprehensible input that, according to Krashen, is  $i + 1$  where  $i$  represents the learner's current level of knowledge/ability and  $i + 1$ , the next higher level. Because it is the stated goal of instruction to provide comprehensible input, and move the learner along a developmental path, "all the teacher need to do is make sure the students understand what is being said or what they are reading. When this happens, when the input is understood, if there is enough of input,  $i + 1$  will usually be covered automatically" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 33). Prabhu uses the term, *reasonable challenge*, to refer to a similar concept. In order then to provide reasonably challenging comprehensible input, the teacher has to exercise language control, which is done not in any systematic way, but naturally, incidentally by regulating the cognitive and communicative complexity of activities and tasks. Regulation of reasonable challenge should then be based on ongoing feedback. Being the primary provider of comprehensible input, the teacher determines the topic, the task, and the challenge level.

*The teacher integrates language skills.* The principle of comprehension-before-production assumes that, at least at the initial level of L2 development, the focus is mainly on listening and reading. Therefore, learning-centered pedagogists do not believe in teaching language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—either in isolation or in strict sequence, as advocated by language-centered pedagogists. The teacher is expected to integrate language skills wherever possible. In fact, the communicative activities and problem-solving tasks create a condition where the learners have to draw, not just from language skills, but from other forms of language use, including gestures and mimes.

*The teacher makes incidental correction.* The learning-centered pedagogy is designed to encourage initial speech production in single words or short phrases thereby minimizing learner errors. The learners will not be forced to communicate before they are able, ready, and willing. However, they are bound to make errors particularly because of the conditions that are created for them to use their limited linguistic repertoire. In such a case, the learning-centered pedagogy attempts to avoid overt error correction. Any correction that takes place should be incidental and not systematic. According to Prabhu (1987, pp. 62–63), incidental correction, in contrast to systematic correction, is (a) confined to particular tokens (i.e. the error itself is corrected, but there is no generalization to the type of error it represents); (b) only responsive (i.e., not leading to any preventive or preemptive action); (c) facilitative (i.e. regarded by learners as a part of getting objective and not being more important than other aspects of the activity);

and (d) transitory (i.e., drawing attention to itself only for a moment—not for as long as systematic correction does).

#### 7.1.4. Content Specifications

The theoretical principles of learning-centered pedagogy warrant content specifications that are very different from the ones we encountered in the case of language- and learner-centered pedagogies. As discussed in earlier chapters, language- and learner-centered methods adhere to a product-based syllabus, whereas learning-centered methods adhere to a process-based syllabus. Unlike the product-based syllabus, where the content of learning/teaching is defined in terms of linguistic features, the process-based syllabus defines it exclusively in terms of communicative activities. In other words, a learning-centered pedagogic syllabus constitutes an indication of learning tasks, rather than an index of language features, leaving the actual language to emerge from classroom interaction.

Because the process syllabus revolves around unpredictable classroom interaction rather than preselected content specifications, learning-centered pedagogists do not attach much importance to syllabus construction. In fact, the NA has not even formulated any new syllabus; it borrows the notional/functional component of the semantic syllabus associated with learner-centered pedagogies, and uses it to implement its own learning-centered pedagogy, thereby proving once again that syllabus specifications do not constrain classroom procedures (see chap. 3, this volume, for a detailed discussion on method vs. content). Unlike the NA, the CTP has formulated its own syllabus known as the *procedural syllabus*. According to Prabhu (1987), the term procedure is used in at least two senses: (a) a specification of classroom activities (including their meaning-content), which bring about language learning; and (b) a specification of procedures (or steps) of classroom activity, but without any implications with respect to either language content or meaning content.

In spite of the terminological differences (i.e. semantic vs. procedural), learning-centered pedagogists advocate a syllabus that consists of open-ended topics, tasks, and situations. The following fragments of a learning-centered syllabus provide some examples:

*Students in the classroom* (from Krashen & Terrell, 1983, pp. 67–70)

1. Personal identification (name, address, telephone number, age, sex, nationality, date of birth, marital status).
2. Description of school environment (identification, description, and location of people and objects in the classroom, description and location of buildings).
3. Classes.
4. Telling time.

*Personal details* (From Prabhu, 1987, pp. 138–143)

- a. Finding items of information relevant to a particular situation in an individual's curriculum vitae.
- b. Constructing a curriculum vitae from personal descriptions.
- c. Organizing/reorganizing a curriculum vitae for a given purpose/audience.
- d. Working out ways of tracing the owners of objects, from information gathered from the objects.

*Role-plays* (From Brown & Palmer, 1988, p. 51)

- a. Ask directions.
- b. Shop: for food, clothing, household items.
- c. Get a hotel room.
- d. Deal with bureaucrats: passport, visa, driver's license.

As the examples show, the syllabus is no more than an open-ended set of options, and as such, gives teachers the freedom and the flexibility needed to select topics and tasks, to grade them, and to present them in a sequence that provides a reasonable linguistic and conceptual challenge.

In any pedagogy, instructional textbooks are designed to embody the principles of curricular specifications. The purpose of the textbook in a learning-centered pedagogy, then, is to provide a context for discourse creation rather than a content for language manipulation. The context may be created from various sources such as brochures, newspaper ads, maps, railway timetables, simulation games, etc. Using these contexts, the teacher makes linguistic input available for and accessible to the learner. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the teacher to add to, omit, adapt, or adopt any of the contexts created by the materials designer depending on specific learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations.

In spite of such a responsibility thrust on the classroom teacher in selecting, grading, and sequencing topics and tasks, the learning-centered pedagogists provide very little guidance for the teacher. Krashen (1982) suggests that the teacher should keep in mind three requirements in the context of syllabus specifications: they can only teach what is learnable, what is portable (i.e. what can be carried in the learner's head), and what has not been acquired. A practical difficulty with this suggestion is that we do not at present know, nor are we likely to know any time soon, how to determine what is learnable, what is portable, or what has been acquired by the learner at any given time.

In addition, in the absence of any objective criteria, determining the linguistic, communicative and cognitive difficulty of learning-oriented tasks in an informed way becomes almost impossible. As Candlin (1987) rightly ob-

served, “any set of task-based materials runs the risk of demoralizing as well as enhancing the self-confidence of learners, in that it is impossible for task designers to gauge accurately in advance the thresholds of competence of different learners” (p. 18). In this context, Prabhu (1987, pp. 87–88) has suggested five “rough measures” of task complexity. According to him, we should take into account: (a) The amount of information needed for the learner to handle a task; (b) the “distance” between the information provided and information to be arrived at as task outcome; (c) the degree of precision called for in solving a task; (d) the learner’s familiarity with purposes and constraints involved in the tasks; and (e) the degree of abstractness embedded in the task. Even these “rough measures” require, as Widowson (1990) pointed out, reliable information about “cognitive development at different stages of maturation, about the conditions, psychological and social, which attend the emergence in the mind of general problem-solving capabilities” (pp. 147–148). Clearly, in terms of the current state of our knowledge, we are not there yet.

Anticipating some of the criticisms about sequencing, learning-centered pedagogists argue that a lack of informed and clear criteria for sequencing linguistic input through communicative tasks need not be a hindrance. Sequencing becomes crucial only in language- and learner-centered pedagogies, which are predominantly content-driven. In a predominantly activity-driven pedagogy, the question of sequencing is only of peripheral interest because what is of paramount importance are classroom procedures rather than language specifications. What the teacher does in the classroom to provide reasonably challenging, comprehensible, meaning-focused input is more important than what the syllabus or the textbook dictates. Consequently, the right place where decisions concerning sequencing should be made is the classroom, and the right person to make those decisions is the practicing teacher.

## 7.2. CLASSROOM PROCEDURES

How do the theoretical principles of learning-centered pedagogy get translated into classroom procedures? In the following section, I deal with this question under two broad headings: input modifications and interactional activities.

### 7.2.1. Input Modifications

The primary objective of learning-centered pedagogy in terms of classroom procedures is the creation of optimum learning conditions through input modifications with the view to encouraging learners to have intense contact

with reasonably challenging, comprehensible input. In that sense, a learning-centered pedagogy is essentially an input-oriented pedagogy, and as such, input modifications assume great significance in its planning and implementation. Of the three types of input modifications—form-based, meaning-based, and form-and meaning-based—discussed in chapter 3, learning-centered pedagogy rests exclusively upon meaning-based input modification with all its merits and demerits. As input-oriented pedagogic programs, learning-centered methods seem to follow classroom procedures that take the form of problem-posing, problem-solving, communicative tasks. They also seem to follow, with varying emphases, a particular pattern in their instructional strategy: They all seek to use a broad range of themes, topics and tasks, give manageable linguistic input, and create opportunities for the learner to engage in a teacher-directed interaction.

The meaning-focused activities advocated by learning-centered pedagogists include what Prabhu (1987, p. 46) has called (a) information-gap, (b) reasoning-gap, and (c) opinion-gap activities:

- Information-gap activity involves a transfer of given information generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from one form to another. As an example, Prabhu suggests pair work in which each member of the pair has a part of the information needed to complete a task, and attempts to convey it verbally to the other.
- Reasoning-gap activity “involves deriving some new information from given information through the processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning or perception of relationships and patterns” (Prabhu, 1987, p. 46). An example is a group of learners jointly deciding on the best course of action for a given purpose and within given constraints.
- Opinion-gap activity “involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling or attitude” (p. 46) in response to a particular theme, topic or task. One example is taking part in a debate or discussion of a controversial social issue.

While the NA followed all these types of activities, the CTP preferred reasoning-gap activity, which proved to be most satisfying in the classroom. In addition, the NA, in accordance with its principle of lowering the affective filters, deliberately introduced an affective-humanistic dimension to classroom activities for the specific purpose of creating or increasing learners’ emotional involvement.

The underlying objective of all these activities is, of course, to provide comprehensible input in order to help learners understand the message. The NA believes that comprehensibility of the input will be increased if the teacher uses repetition and paraphrase, as in:

There are two men in this picture. Two. One, two (counting). They are young. There are two young men. At least I think they are young. Do you think that they are young? Are the two men young? Or old? Do you think that they are young or old? (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 77)

The teacher is expected to weave these repetitions naturally into classroom discourse so that they do not sound like repetitions. This procedure not only helps the learner understand the message but it also tends to minimize errors because the learner is expected to respond in single words or short phrases. In the CTP, the language necessary for the learner to accomplish a task emerges through what is called the pre-task. During the pre-task stage, the teacher provides appropriate linguistic assistance by paraphrasing or glossing expressions, by employing parallel situations or diagrams, or by re-organizing information (see the classroom transcript to come). What is achieved through the pre-task is the regulation of comprehensible input.

It is in the context of regulating language input that Prabhu introduces the concept of *reasonable challenge*. The concept relates to both the cognitive difficulty and the linguistic complexity of the task, and, therefore, it is something that the teacher has to be aware of through ongoing feedback from learners. When classroom activities turn out to be difficult for learners, the teacher should be able “to guide their efforts step by step, making the reasoning explicit or breaking it down into smaller steps, or offering parallel instances to particular steps” (Prabhu, 1987, p. 48). Such a regulation of input is deemed necessary to make sure that the learner perceives the task to be challenging but attainable.

Within such a context, the linguistic input available in the classroom comes mostly from the teacher. The teacher speaks only the target language while the learners use either their first language or the second. If the learners choose to respond in the still-developing target language, their errors are not corrected unless communication is seriously impaired, and even then, only incidental correction is offered. There is very little interactive talk among the learners themselves because the learners’ output is considered secondary to L2 development.

Learning-centered pedagogists contend that regulating input and teacher talk in order to provide reasonably challenging, comprehensible input is qualitatively different from systematized, predetermined, linguistic input associated with language- and learner-centered pedagogies. The language that is employed in learning-centered tasks, they argue, is guided and constrained only by the difficulty level of the task on hand. However, regardless of the pedagogic intentions, the instructional intervention and the control of language in the way just characterized appears to bear a remarkable resemblance to the methods that the learning-centered pedagogy is quite explicitly intended to replace (Beretta, 1990; Brumfit, 1984; Widdowson, 1990).



Furthermore, as the experimental studies reviewed in chapter 3 show, meaning-focused input modifications by themselves do not lead to the development of desired levels of language knowledge/ability. Learners should be helped to obtain language input in its full functional range, relevant grammatical rules and sociolinguistic norms in context, and helpful corrective feedback. The studies also show that it is the meaningful interaction that accelerates the learning process. Besides, the input modifications advocated by learning-centered pedagogies create a classroom atmosphere that can only lead to limited interactional opportunities, as we see next.

### 7.2.2. Interactional Activities

In spite of the underlying theoretical principle that it is through meaningful interaction with the input, the task, and the teacher that learners are given the opportunity to explore syntactic and semantic choices of the target language, learning-centered pedagogists attach a very low priority to negotiated interaction between participants in the classroom event. According to them, two-way interaction is not essential for language development. What is essential is the teacher talk. When we “just talk to our students, if they understand, we are not only giving a language lesson, we may be giving the best possible language lesson since we will be supplying input for acquisition” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 35). Even watching television, if it is comprehensible, is considered more helpful than two-way interaction. In chapter 3, we discussed how the three interrelated, overlapping dimensions of classroom interaction—interaction as a textual activity, interaction as an interpersonal activity, and interaction as an ideational activity—make it easier for learners to notice potential language input and recognize form-function relationships embedded in the input. Let us see how these dimensions of interactional modifications are realized in the learning-centered pedagogy.

**7.2.2.1. *Interaction as a Textual Activity.*** From the perspective of interaction as a textual activity, the learning-centered class offers considerable evidence for the predominance of the teacher’s role in providing, not only reasonably challenging input, but also linguistic and conversational cues that help the learner participate in classroom interaction. Although the explicit focus of the interaction is supposed to be on understanding the intended message, it has not been possible to fully ignore the textual realization of the message content in general, and the syntactic and semantic features of the language input in particular.

To encourage learner participation and early production, Krashen and Terrell (1983) suggested several procedures including what they call open-ended sentence, open dialogue, and association. In open-ended sentence,

the learners are given a sentence with an open slot provided “for their contribution.” For example:

“In this room there is a \_\_\_\_\_. I am wearing a \_\_\_\_\_. In my purse there is a \_\_\_\_\_.  
In my bedroom I have a \_\_\_\_\_. After class I want to \_\_\_\_\_. (p. 84).

The open dialogue provides two and three line dialogues to lead learners “to creative production.” The dialogues are practiced in small groups. For example:

Where are you going?  
To the \_\_\_\_\_  
What for?  
To \_\_\_\_\_ (p. 84).

Association activities are intended to get students to participate in conversation about activities they enjoy doing. Besides, the meaning of a new item “is associated not only with its target language form but with a particular student.” For example:

I like to \_\_\_\_\_  
you like to \_\_\_\_\_  
he likes to \_\_\_\_\_  
she likes to \_\_\_\_\_ (p. 85).

All these procedures involve prefabricated patterns that are “memorized ‘chunks’ that can be used as unanalyzed pieces of language in conversation” (p. 85). The teacher is expected to make comments and ask simple questions based on the learner’s response. Once again, the focus has been teacher input rather than learner output.

At a later stage in learner production, interaction as a textual activity goes beyond memorized chunks and unanalyzed pieces. Consider the following episode from a typical CTP class during the pre-task stage, in which the teacher is expected to provide reasonably challenging linguistic input. The episode deals with the timetable for an express train:

*Teacher:* That is Brindavan Express which goes from Madras to Bangalore. Where does it stop on the way?

*Students:* Katpadi.

*Teacher:* Katpadi and . . .

*Students:* Jolarpet.

*Teacher:* Jolarpet, yes. What time does it leave Madras?

*Students:* Seven twenty-five a.m.

*Teacher:* Seven twenty-five . . .

*Students:* . . . a.m.

*Teacher:* Yes, seven twenty-five a.m. What time does it arrive in Bangalore?

*Students:* Nine . . . One

*Teacher:* What time does it arrive . . .

*Students:* (severally) One p.m. . . . One thirty p.m. . . . One p.m.

*Teacher:* Who says one p.m.? . . . Who says one thirty p.m.? (pause) Not one thirty p.m. One p.m. is correct. One p.m. When does it arrive in Katpadi?

*Students:* Nine fifteen a.m. . . . Nine fifteen a.m.

*Teacher:* . . . arrive . . . arrive in Katpadi.

*Students:* Nine fifteen a.m.

*Teacher:* Nine fifteen a.m. Correct . . . When does it leave Jolarpet? Don't give the answer, put up your hands. When does it leave Jolarpet? When does it leave Jolarpet? When does it leave Jolarpet? When does it leave Jolarpet? (pause) Any more . . . ? [indicates student 11].

*Student 11:* Ten thirty p.m.

*Student:* Leaves Jolarpet at ten thirty . . .

*Student 11:* a.m.

*Teacher:* a.m. yes. Ten thirty a.m. correct . . . Now you have to listen carefully. For how long . . . for how long does it stop at Katpadi? How long is the stop in Katpadi . . . [indicates student 4].

*Student 4:* Five minutes.

*Teacher:* Five minutes, yes. How do you know?

*Student X:* Twenty . . .

*Student 4:* Twenty minus fifteen.

*Teacher:* Fifteen . . . nine fifteen arrival, nine twenty departure . . . twenty minus fifteen, five, yes . . . How long is the stop at Jolarpet? How long is the stop at Jolarpet? [After a pause, the teacher indicates student 12].

*Student 12:* Two minutes.

*Teacher:* Two minutes, yes. Thirty minus twenty-eight, two minutes, yes, correct.

(Prabhu, 1987, pp. 126–127)

Here, the teacher leads the learners step by step to the desired outcome through a series of meaning-oriented exchanges, each step requiring a greater effort of cognitive reasoning than the previous one. The teacher also simplifies the linguistic input to make it more comprehensible when the learner's response indicates the need for such simplification. In the absence of memorized chunks, learners are forced to use their limited repertoire in order to cope with the developing discourse. They have been observed to adopt various strategies such as

using single words, resorting to gestures, quoting from the blackboard or the sheet which stated the task, waiting for the teacher to formulate alternative responses so that they could simply choose one of them, seeking a suggestion from a peer, or, as a last resort, using the mother tongue. (Prabhu, 1987, p. 59)

As the aforementioned examples show, interaction in the meaning-oriented, learning-centered class does involve, quite prominently, characteristics of interaction as a textual activity, that is, interactional modifications initiated and directed by the teacher in order to provide linguistic as well as conversational signals that directly or indirectly sensitize the learner to the syntactic and semantic realizations of the message content. There are critics who, not without justification, consider that this kind of interaction implicitly involves a focus on the form characteristic of language- and learner-centered methods (e.g., Beretta, 1990).

**7.2.2.2. *Interaction as an Interpersonal Activity.*** Interaction as an interpersonal activity offers participants in the L2 class opportunities to establish and maintain social relationships and individual identities through pair and/or group activities. It enhances personal rapport and lowers the affective filter. Of the two learning-centered methods considered here, the NA has deliberately introduced what are called affective-humanistic activities involving the learner's wants, needs, feelings, and emotions. These activities are carried out mainly through dialogues, role-plays, and interviews. At the initial stages of language production, these activities begin with short dialogues that contain a number of routines and patterns although more open-ended role-plays and interviews are used at later stages. Consider the following:

## 1. Dialogue:

Student 1: What do you like to do on Saturdays?

Student 2: I like to \_\_\_\_\_.

Student 1: Did you \_\_\_\_\_ last Saturday?

Student 2: Yes, I did.

(No, I didn't. I \_\_\_\_\_.) (p. 100)

## 2. Role-play:

You are a young girl who is sixteen years old. You went out with a friend at eight o'clock. You are aware of the fact that your parents require you to be at home at 11:00 at the latest. But you return at 12:30 and your father is very angry.

Your father: Well, I'm waiting for an explanation.

Why did you return so late?

You: \_\_\_\_\_ (p. 101).

## 3. Interview:

When you were a child, did you have a nickname? What games did you play? When during childhood did you first notice the difference between boys and girls? What is something you once saw that gave you a scare? (p. 102)

These affective-humanistic activities, as Krashen and Terrell (1983) pointed out, have several advantages: they have the potential to lower affective filters, to provide opportunities for interaction in the target language, to allow the use of routines and patterns, and to provide comprehensible input. Once again, even though dialogues, role-plays and interviews have been used in language- and learner-centered pedagogies, the affective-humanistic activities advocated by learning-centered pedagogists are supposed to form the center of the program and are expected to help learners regulate input and manage conversations.

Unlike the NA, the CTP does not, by design, promote interaction as an interpersonal activity. The CTP treats affective-humanistic activities as incidental to teacher-directed reasoning. In that sense, it is relatively more teacher fronted than the NA. Interaction as an interpersonal activity through pair and group work is avoided mainly because of "a risk of fossilization—that is to say of learners' internal systems becoming too firm too soon and much less open to revision when superior data are available" (Prabhu, 1987, p. 82). Empirical evidence, however, suggests that the fear of fossilization is not really well-founded. A substantial body of L2 interactional studies demonstrates that pair and group activities produce more interactional opportunities than teacher-fronted activities. They also show that learner-learner interaction produces more opportunities for negotiation of meaning than do teacher-learner interactions, thus contributing to

better comprehension and eventually to quicker system development (see chap. 3, this volume, for details). Besides, avoiding learner–learner interaction may be depriving the learner of language output that can feed back into the input loop (see chap. 2, this volume).

**7.2.2.3. *Interaction as an Ideational Activity.*** Interaction as an ideational activity is an expression of one’s own experience of the real or imaginary world inside, around, and beyond the classroom. It pertains to sharing personal experiences learners bring with them and is measured in terms of cultural and world knowledge. Believing as it does in meaningful interaction, learning-centered pedagogy should provide opportunities for learners to discuss topics that are relevant and interesting to them, to express their own opinions and feelings, and to interpret and evaluate the views of others.

As mentioned in the previous subsection, the affective-humanistic activities advocated by the NA follow, to a large degree, the characteristics of interaction as an interpersonal activity. They also carry an element of interaction as an ideational activity to the extent that activities involve the learner’s past and present experiences. However, the affective-humanistic activities do not sufficiently address the issue of interaction as an ideational activity. There is, of course, meaning-based interaction, but not genuine communication that can result in the sharing of personal experience and world knowledge. In an evaluation of the NA, Krashen himself laments that the “only weakness” of the NA “is that it remains a classroom method, and for some students this prohibits the communication of interesting and relevant topics” (Krashen, 1982, p. 140). He implies that the interactional activities of the NA are not designed to be inherently interesting and practically relevant to the learner—something that can hardly be considered ideational in content.

If the NA, which emphasizes affective-humanistic activities, finds it difficult to promote interaction as an ideational activity in class, the CTP, which deemphasizes such activities, cannot obviously be expected to fare any better. However, one commentator actually finds that learning and teaching in the CTP “is achieved through making ideational meaning” (Berns, 1990, p. 164). Berns bases her argument on three points. First, she asserts, “emphasis on problem-solving tasks is emphasis on ideational meaning. For learners, this implies engaging in ‘reasoning-gap activities’” (p. 157). But even Prabhu has defined problem-solving, reasoning-gap activity in terms of mind engagement rather than emotional involvement. It therefore seems to me that a problem-solving task that entails “deciding upon the best course of action for a given purpose and within given constraints” is not, as Berns (1990) claims, a “means of engaging learners in the expression of ideational meaning” (p. 158) but rather a means of engaging them in the exercise of cognitive effort.

Berns' (1990) second argument is that the difference between focus on meaning and focus on form is the difference between focus on lexis and focus on structure. She points out,

in a series of questions based on information given in a train schedule learners would not distinguish between "when does the train reach Katpadi?", "When does the train leave Katpadi?" How long does the train stay at Katpadi." Instead, they would treat each question as being the same except for lexical changes . . . (p. 164)

Based on this observation, Berns concludes that the CTP is focusing on learning how to mean in the Hallidayan sense and is, therefore, concerned with ideational meaning. One wonders whether learning how to mean with all its social semiotic dimensions (cf: chap. 1, this volume) can be reduced to learning how to solve problems, which is almost entirely a cognitive activity.

Furthermore, Berns (1990) said rather emphatically that the purpose of the CTP "is, in fact, the development of communicative competence" (p. 166). She maintains that the Indian school-age learners develop communicative competence because, they "are developing the ability to express, interpret, and negotiate meaning in the classroom setting in which they use English" (p. 166). As we discussed earlier, what the CTP class offers in plenty is interaction as a textual activity where the learner's attempt to express, interpret, and negotiate is confined to developing linguistic knowledge/ability and not pragmatic knowledge/ability. It is unfair to expect the CTP pedagogists to deliver something that they say is not their business. Prabhu (1987, p. 1) makes it very clear that the focus of the CTP was not on "communicative competence" in the sense of achieving social or situational appropriacy, but rather on "grammatical competence" itself. In fact, one of the reasons why he rejects the suitability of learner-centered pedagogies with its emphasis on sociocultural elements of L2 to the Indian context is that Indian students do not generally need the English language for everyday communicative purposes. The CTP is fundamentally based on the philosophy that communication in the classroom could be "a good means of developing grammatical competence in learners, quite independently of the issue of developing functional or social appropriacy in language use" (Prabhu, 1987, pp. 15–16).

To sum up, as far as classroom procedures are concerned, learning-centered pedagogy is exclusively and narrowly concerned with meaning-based input modifications to the exclusion of explicit form-based, and form-and meaning-based input modifications. In terms of interactional activities, it is primarily concerned with interaction as a textual activity and narrowly with interaction as an interpersonal activity, and negligibly with interaction as an ideational activity.

### 7.3. A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Learning-centered methods represent, at least in theory, a radical departure from language- and learner-centered pedagogies. The idea of teaching an L2 through meaning-based activities using materials that are not preselected and presequenced had been suggested before. However, it was learning-centered pedagogists who, through well-articulated concepts of learning and teaching supported, at least partially, by research in L2 development, tried to seriously and systematically formulate theoretical principles and classroom procedures needed to translate an abstract idea into a workable proposition. Their prime contribution lies in attempting fundamental methodological changes rather than superficial curricular modifications, in shaping a pedagogic dialogue that directed our attention to the process of learning rather than the product of teaching, and in raising new questions that effectively challenged traditional ways of constructing an L2 pedagogy. This is a remarkable achievement, indeed.

Learning-centered pedagogists' rejection of linearity and systematicity geared to mastering a unitary target language system, and the acceptance of a cyclical, holistic process consisting of several transitional systems makes eminent sense in terms of intuitive appeal. However, the maximization of incidental learning and teacher input, and the marginalization of intentional learning and learner output render learning-centered methods empirically unfounded and pedagogically unsound. Because of its preoccupation with reasonably challenging comprehensible input, the learning-centered pedagogy pays scant attention, if at all, to several intake factors that have been found to play a crucial role in L2 development (see chap. 2, this volume).

Furthermore, all available classroom interactional analyses (see, e.g., a review of the literature presented in Gass, 1997) show that the instructional intervention and the control of language exercised by learning-centered teachers are at variance with the conceptual considerations that sought to provide "natural" linguistic input that is different from "contrived" linguistic input associated with earlier pedagogies. The input modifications advocated by learning-centered pedagogies create only limited interactional opportunities in the classroom because they largely promote interaction as a textual activity, neglecting interaction as interpersonal and ideational activities.

In the final analysis, learning-centered pedagogists have left many crucial questions unanswered. They include:

- How to determine the cognitive difficulty and the communicative difficulty of a task, and, more importantly, the difference between the two;
- how to formulate reasonably acceptable criteria for developing, grading, sequencing, and evaluating tasks;



- how to design relevant summative and formative evaluation measures that could reflect the learning-centered pedagogy, not only in terms of the content of teaching but also in terms of the process of learning;
- how to determine the kind of demand the new pedagogy makes on teachers in order to design appropriate teacher education measures.

Until some of these problems are satisfactorily addressed, any learning-centered method will remain “largely a matter of coping with the unknown . . .” (Prabhu, 1985, p. 173).

#### 7.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I attempted to define and describe the theoretical principles and classroom procedures associated with learning-centered pedagogy with particular reference to the Natural Approach and the Communicational Teaching Project. The discussion has shown how some of the methodological aspects of learning-centered pedagogy are innovative and how certain aspects of its classroom implementation bore close resemblance to the pedagogic orientation that it seeks to replace. Finally, the chapter has highlighted several issues that learning-centered pedagogists leave unanswered.

This chapter concludes Part Two, in which I have correlated some of the fundamental features of language, language learning, and teaching identified in Part One. As we journeyed through the historical developmental phases of language-teaching methods, it has become apparent that each of the methods tried to address some of the perceived shortcomings of the previous one. It is worthwhile to recall, once again, Mackey’s distinction between method analysis and teaching analysis. What Part Two has focused on is method analysis. What practicing teachers actually do in class may not correspond to the analysis and description presented in Part Two.

It is common knowledge that practicing teachers, faced with unpredictable learning/teaching needs, wants, and situations, have always taken liberty with the pedagogic formulations prescribed by theorists of language-teaching methods. In committing such “transgressions,” they have always attempted, using their robust common sense and rough-weather experience, to draw insights from several sources and put together highly personalized teaching strategies that go well beyond the concept of method as conceived and constructed by theorists. In the final part of this book, I discuss the limitations of the concept of method, and highlight some of the attempts that have been made so far to transcend those limitations.

