Promoting Student Autonomy and the Co-creation of the L2 Class Through Linguistic Theory

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Abstract
In this paper, I will present ways in which linguistic theory can be combined with appropriate teaching methods in order to further develop learner's independence and promote the co-construction of methodologies for the L2 class. For this purpose, I will refer to the use of some key concepts from Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics and describe how they were used in a seminar focused on the use of Spanish in different contexts. I will stress how the combination of theoretical linguistics and current innovative pedagogical approaches can be interlinked to achieve, not only more skilled language students, but also more skilled teachers. Through many aspects of the communicative approach have been included in the teaching of Spanish in the UK, I believe that, more generally, a change is needed within our educational culture: I suggest that the incorporation of these and other theoretical concepts when teaching the use of language may be beneficial for learners, as long as it's applied in conjunction with a student centered and cumulative approach, as well as constructive alignment (between other teaching methods.) I propose that this change in perspective has the potential of helping to develop a more reflective, dynamic and flexible pedagogy of a second language, where learners and educators co-produce the process of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Teaching Methods; Linguistic Theory; Pragmatics; Sociolinguistics; Second Language Learning; Second Language Teaching

Introduction

In this paper I will discuss how to address the teaching of communicative competence in the L2 class. I will propose that the combination of some general theoretical concepts from linguistics with the adequate pedagogical approaches is beneficial to the learning process. The use of these tools helps students develop metalinguistic awareness through concepts, but also, crucially, both the proposed pedagogical approaches and the linguistic and communicative processes examined in the theory are evidence-based. Indeed, linguistic theory has developed a good description of the linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic processes involved in communication. As a result, we can confidently talk about universal structures, strategies and processes, as well as their variation (Kasper and Rose 2001). Furthermore, the pedagogical approaches used here may encourage both teachers and learners to develop a more reflective and dynamic practice in the classroom; this, in turn, may promote the co-production of teaching practices and (socio)linguistic meaning in class.

Through many aspects of the communicative approach (CA) have been included in the teaching of Spanish and other languages in the UK, I will argue that, more generally, a change is needed within our educational culture. An evidence-based pedagogy paired with a robust theoretical background is needed to fully develop learning and teaching practices in the L2 class. For this purpose, I will examine some of the ideas stemming from current literature on these topics. In addition, I will present examples of my own teaching practices, illustrating how I develop a course and lesson design in order to articulate some of these ideas.

Theories, methodologies and research on communicative competence and academic acquisition of L2

Extensive work has been produced in the area of L2 teaching, as well as on the issues related to communicative competence in the classroom. Since Hymes (1971) and Gumperz and Hymes (1972) introduced and examined the concept of communicative competence, several works have proposed theoretical models and methodologies for the teaching of this ability in a second language. Notably, Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) suggested two well-known frameworks of communicative competence. More recently, Rose and Kasper (2001), Kasper and Rose (2002) and Burns and Richards (2012) offer an overview of issues related to the learning of teaching of pragmatics in L2; while Goh and Burns (2012) provide an overview and a concrete proposal for the teaching of communicative competence in the L2 classroom. Conversely, works like the one presented by Geeslin and Long (2014) concentrate on sociolinguistic competence, which for other authors should be included within pragmatic competence.

Regarding proposals for teaching in the literature, it emerges that one of the most important problems the lack of appropriate natural language input. Indeed, it is often pointed out that the L2 class lacks real language exposure and/or doesn't consider the specificities of spoken language; this is particularly relevant when it comes to learning day-to-day conversation (as mentioned in Burns, Joyce and Gollin, 1996; Rose and Kasper, 2001, or Roberts, 2001). As early as 1988, Myers Scotton and Janice Bernstein were amongst the first to point out the necessity to use real language in order to teach speech in a way that it would reflect the reality of spoken

communication. Within this approach, the study of linguistic structures and organization would be primary, leading the pedagogy towards a developing corpus of research on language use. If natural language is not integrated in teaching, the input that students receive is affected (it may be idealized, unrealistic, or very limited); furthermore, students are not taught the structures and strategies present in real language settings (see Rose and Kasper, 2001; Goh and Burns, 2012).

Within the examination of communicative competence in the teaching environment, there is also a body of research that focuses in the actual results of different methods (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Takahashi, 2001; Nguyen, 2018, between many others. See Kasper, 2001 for an overview). These are generally studies that focus in one aspect of pragmatic development. As a result of research, it has been recognized that instruction in pragmatic aspects of language helps students to learn the pragmatics of L2 (Kubota, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Nguyen, 2018; Taguchi, 2015). Consequently, it makes sense to develop a suitable methodology for it. As for the particular methodological approaches, I won't discuss them here, but I will mention that explicit teaching appears to be more efficient than implicit teaching (House, 1996; Tateyama el al., 1997; Taguchi, 2015). Results are, however, not conclusive when it comes to teaching pragmatic competence through deductive versus inductive reasoning (Kennet, Rose and Kwai-fun, 2001). Finally, input enhancement, which draws student's attention to input, seems to be generally effective (Takahashi, 2001).

Whilst there is need for further research on the instruction of the various aspects of communicative competence, it seems clear that certain methods are more effective than others. Additionally, there is extensive research that evidences the existence of discursive/pragmatic/sociolinguistic universals, as well as a relevant corpus of research on sociolinguistic variation. Therefore, the pedagogical practice, paired with the appropriate linguistic theory, provide the conceptual and descriptive tools to make communicative competence available to students through implicit and explicit instruction.

The pedagogy of communicative competence and the communicative approach

The communicative approach has been introduced in learning settings mainly in the form of language activities where learners have opportunities to use the language, changing the focus of teaching towards language use and away from prescriptive methodologies. A general explanation of this approach can be found in Richards (2006).

Although the communicative approach has taken root in L2 teaching in the last decades, this doesn't mean that communication is actually taught appropriately. Firstly, not all the procedures of the CA have been proven successful in the teaching of communicative competence. For instance, as a consequence of emphasis on the student's active role, together with opportunities to develop skills, there is generally a lack of explicit instruction. This, despite existing evidence that explicit instruction is more efficient for learning pragmatic skills. Also, it is unclear if inductive learning is more or less effective than deductive learning (as explained above). Furthermore, affective or emotional factors that are naturally present in the classroom are often not taken into account, which makes teaching less efficient (Goh and Burns (2012).

Secondly, the fact that the teacher in the CA is "tolerant of learners' errors" (Richards, 2006) often means that not enough feedback and corrective input is given (Goh and Burns, 2012). Also affecting the quality of the input students receive, natural language is frequently absent in the teaching environment. There are significant limitations in this regard that stem from the materials available to teachers, which often lack natural language samples (Goh and Burns, 2012).

Finally, offering practical activities without an appropriate, theoretically robust structuring and conceptualization of what it's been taught will not help learners to develop the appropriate understanding of how the L2 is used. This will likely mean that context-specific linguistic performance is not generalized and applied to other contexts, creating a segmented, not cumulative, learning experience (Maton, 2007).

Therefore, if the CA has clearly brought some positive innovation into teaching, its application still needs to introduce in the methodology both a more robust theoretical background and a better pedagogy, which should be based on actual research in classroom settings as much as possible.

One crucial advantage of the communicative approach is that it promotes the negotiation of meaning. Indeed, from a pedagogical point of view, the CA sees student active participation as the best way to provide a classroom environment that favors the acquisition of communicative competence (Richards, 2006:13). Activities should be related to the interest of students, linked to their own experience, and engaging. These are all positive contributions from the CA, which should be integrated both in the planning and delivery of lessons. Another positive contribution relates to the role of the teacher in the CA classroom as a facilitator, as explained by Richards (2006:13).

These and other useful perspectives provided by the CA permeate L2 pedagogical methodologies, materials and classroom practices today. They can also be used in connection with some prevalent approaches to teaching, such as the idea of cumulative learning. Cumulative learning refers to universal characteristics of the learning process, in accordance with research. Approaches to cumulative learning may be based broadly in Gagne's Conditions of Learning Theory (Gagne, 1985). From this approach, I used the Nine Events of Instruction proposed by Gagne, Briggs, L. J., & Wager, W. W. (1992) as a basic structure for the activities in the Spanish classroom. Cumulative learning pedagogy may also broadly refer to generalization of the knowledge acquired, as well as the ability to use it in different contexts (Maton, 2009). This perspective is generally linked to a student-centered approach, where the teacher is, as in the CA, a facilitator, with student participation at the core of the learning process. A student centered approach tends to emphasize the active role of the student, as well as student's ability to make choices.

In order to better plan lessons in line with these perspectives, the idea of constructive alignment has been proposed. According to Biggs (2003), the teacher should create a learning environment that promotes the achievement of the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOS). The use of appropriate learning strategies, together with a suitable conceptual linguistic framework, facilitates this work by the teacher, as I will exemplify.

In relation to all these elements that are relevant for the pedagogy of L2, a change in the teaching culture that incorporate the results of research on pedagogical practices has the potential of helping to develop a more reflective, dynamic and flexible pedagogy of a second language, where learners and educators co-produce the process of teaching and learning. In relation to this change, I will stress here some key ideas that I use as basic principles in my teaching practice:

-Lessons provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning.
-Lessons are designed to provide cumulative learning.
-Lessons are planned in accordance with constructive alignment.
-Focus is on learners' active engagement in the learning process, rather than passive reception.
-The teacher is a facilitator, but they guide learners with clear concepts and well planned structures.
-The teacher provides explicit learning, helping the students to learn communicative competence through both inductive and deductive processes.
-Output is encouraged, students given opportunities for choice and development of accuracy and fluency.
-The teacher provides active engagement and appropriate feedback, including corrective feedback.
-Lessons provide instruction on aspects that are relevant to students' own experience and interests.

An example of a seminar integrating theoretical and pedagogical approaches

As an example of this approach, I will explain the structure and delivery of a short seminar that I ran in Cardiff University for undergraduate language students of Spanish (L2). The purpose of the 2.5 hours long seminar was to teach students basics on how to communicate in different formal and informal situations in Spanish. Despite the fact that the degree itself includes a year of study abroad, preparation for real verbal communication is mostly limited to debate and discussion, activities that do not really prepare students for their day to day lives in Spain.

Students have intermediate to advanced level of Spanish proficiency, but their ability to communicate and understand communication in Spanish varies widely. Some are relatively confident on oral conversation, while others are very inhibited and a lack verbal resources, making it more challenging to teach them together. This is somehow balanced by the size of the class, which is limited to 12 students: a small group is more manageable and gives the teacher opportunities to interact individually with students during the activities.

I ran two seminars where I followed the same structure, but changing emphasis in different aspects upon taking into account student feedback. This feedback is used as a tool to further reflect on my own role as a teacher, stablishing which processes and activities are more efficient at creating the appropriate learning environment.

I refer here at the particular organization of activities in the course. The same sequence is followed and repeated through the seminar, introducing different sets of activities (i.e. writing an email, role plays, or organizing a conversation in the correct sequence). I then explain how these activities fit in the pedagogical framework

explained earlier. I do not go into detail here on all the aspects of this framework as they were applied to this seminar, but will concentrate on some of them.

The seminar is structured as a succession of activities, each focused in one theoretical concept, all following the structure

1. Reflection
2. Input
3. Output
4. Reflection

In the first stage, the teacher gains student attention, for example by raising a question or showing an interesting piece of natural language. Students have opportunities to then discuss as group discussion, pair discussion or individual reflection. In this activity students can use any communicative knowledge they have, be it on their L1 or L2, to reflect on a particular linguistic aspect and apply inductive learning. This activity would run for 5 to 10 minutes. Just before or after this activity, students are informed of the learning objectives of the exercise.

In the second stage, which may merge with the first one, students are exposed to input. Students have opportunities to observe the input in different ways (watching a video, reading an email, reading a conversation, reading particular linguistic units that they will be able to use in the following stage). The diverse input and reflection upon it contribute to focus the attention of students in particular aspects of communication, contributing to cumulative learning orientated towards ILOS. It also facilitates learning for students with different learning styles. This activity runs for around 5 to 10 minutes.

The third stage provides opportunities for students to apply what they have observed through output production. These were for the most part pair activities, thought they were designed to allow for activities with three students, in case the number of students was not even. At this point, the teacher moves through pairs, providing guidance upon student needs and given individual feedback on output, including corrective feedback. There also may be variable opportunities to assess students here. The length of this activity is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Students are consulted as to the duration of this stage: all students should have sufficient time to finish their task and to consult the teacher, no student should be disengaged, waiting for others to finish. For more confident students, there are opportunities to complete more than one task (usually a set of conversations). Students provide very positive feedback on this activity.

In the last stage, reflection upon the previous activity is encouraged as group discussion. Theoretical concepts are explained at the light of students contributions to the discussion. Note that often students already have the pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge necessary to examine relevant concepts, only they don't have the conceptualization necessary to become aware of them. This presentation of theoretical concepts allows the teacher to provide explicit instruction, whilst deductive learning may facilitate generalization of knowledge and transfer to other contexts, in line with cumulative learning. This strategy works very well with most students, with many reporting that it is useful.

From a pedagogical point of view, this structure favors both inductive and deductive learning, as well as providing opportunities for cumulative learning. Students with different learning styles can take part actively, having increased agency on how they produce language or reflect upon it. The structure of the activity itself helps the teacher to concentrate and incite reflection on relevant elements of communicative competence. For example, one activity runs around opening, closing and response strategies appropriate for different formal and informal phone conversations. Openings, closings and responses were introduced in previous activities; in this activity, students produce output and engage in reflection upon politeness. The following is an example of a role play activity proposed for this topic:

Perform the following role plays (in pairs), using the turns provided, or build your own turns. If you are not comfortable with talking spontaneously, you can write your conversations, then practice them out loud.

1. BUSCANDO PISO

Hablante 1

Llamas a una agencia para preguntar por un par de pisos que has visto anunciados en internet. Te atiende una persona muy agradable. Quedáis en que irás a la oficina de la agencia mañana, para ver los dos pisos.

Hablante 2

Te llama un-a estudiante extranjero-a para preguntar por dos pisos que tenéis en la agencia. Registras los datos del cliente y quedas con él-ella para ver las propiedades mañana por la tarde.

As illustrated here, the structure of the activities itself, paired with the methods by which the lesson is delivered, can be used to teach theoretical concepts, while also achieving particular pedagogical aims. Even teachers with a poor knowledge of the state of the art in this area can use these or similar principles to advance on the pedagogy of their practice.

Regarding more specifically to how linguistic theory in integrated in the structure of the course: a theoretical framework emerging from a number of linguistic disciplines was used to structure the seminar around different topics. Each topic concentrates on one or a set of concepts, which are then examined and used in accordance with the activity sequence explained above. In this way, students develop their communicative competence in L2 in a way that is coherently structured, and conceptually explained, in accordance with well stablished concepts from linguistics. Consequently, explicit instruction is well-founded, being stablished upon evidence-based linguistic knowledge.

Furthermore, this makes instruction easier, since the teacher can utilise the theoretical background to design lessons more likely to encourage cumulative learning and easily aligned to ILOS. Grammar is often taught in a similar manner, with courses and lessons structured in accordance with grammatical categories and functions. This has also been done in the teaching of L2 communicative competence, when authors have

applied functions or speech acts to structure their lessons and provide explicit or implicit instruction. However, it needs greater development when it comes to other structures, strategies and rules for the suitable development of communicative competence.

The seminar was organized as it follows:

1. Oral discourse is structured. Opening, closings, turns.
2. Oral discourse is context-specific. Formal and informal situations.
3. Oral discourse follows pragmatic rules. Politeness.
4. Pragmatic rules are linked to social rules. Power and distance relations.

Teaching each of these topics by using a repetitive structure of activities reinforces cumulative learning. Firstly, it increases the level of complexity of the learning experience. For instance: from being aware that openings are important, to linking these to particular strategies to show politeness or to be impolite. Secondly, it provides a conceptual organization of the different elements taught in the seminar, with each topic focusing in a set, small number of topics; awareness of these can help students to structure their knowledge and apply it to other contexts. This structure also makes it more feasible for the teacher to apply constructive alignment: the ILOS can be matched with each theoretical concept/topic, and students can be made aware of ILOS in a way that is coherent with the basic structure of the course. Finally, it makes explicit instruction more coherent and concept-specific, encouraging students to reflect upon these concepts and promoting both generalization to other contexts and awareness of the relevance of specific situations as opposed to others.

Conclusions. Student autonomy and the co-creation of the L2 class

In this paper I suggest that an appropriate combination of theoretical linguistics and pedagogical approaches in the teaching of communicative competence will achieve, not only more skilled language students, but also more skilled teachers. I argue that this requires a change in perspective in our teaching culture, involving the full application of previous research on both linguistic structures/processes and pedagogical practices.

I point out how a cumulative approach can be promoted through certain teaching and learning processes. Crucially, the presentation of theoretical concepts allows the teacher to provide explicit instruction that may facilitate generalization of knowledge and transfer to other contexts. As these concepts are based on research on discursive, pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language, it will be a much more accurate description of the linguistic structures and strategies needed for communication in real life. However, if these concepts are absent, explicit instruction suffers and students may acquire poor metalinguistic awareness.

From a pedagogical point of view, student autonomy is promoted by applying some of the principles of the CA, combined with a cumulative learning and student centered approach, as well as through the appropriate constructive alignment in relation to ILOS. Negotiation of meaning and other educational aims are achieved by different procedures, such as consulting students about how the lesson is conducted, giving them a choice of activities, providing suitable feedback and the re-framing of

student's contributions within theoretical knowledge. These and other teaching strategies encourage co-creation of the learning process. It also makes it easier for the teacher to act as a facilitator and to provide the necessary implicit and explicit instruction while, at the same time, promoting student engagement.

There are a number of aspects that are important for the pedagogy of L2 that haven't been examined here, due to the limited scope of this work. For the purposes of exemplification, thought, I have shown how the structuring of activities, the particular procedures within them, and the use of a robust theoretical background, can be used to design and run a class will may be more efficient in the development of communicative competence.

There are, though, obvious limitations to providing an instruction that specifically targets communicative competence through a short seminar. The scope and effectiveness of such a seminar are clearly limited, thought they haven't been evaluated. Student feedback was obtained and it was very positive, but this doesn't give us any information about the actual efficiency of the course in terms of learner recall of what has been taught, together with its application to different contexts in real life.

Other work is being done in order to refine and develop methodologies and materials for teaching. From the point of view of the exploration involved in this paper, many questions are raised regarding a wide array of approaches and disciplines focusing in communicative competence, thought these are too far reaching for discussion here. Furthermore, more research is needed in order to establish more specifically which strategies would be best for the teaching of the different aspects of communicative competence in L2 in higher education.

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