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Creative methods of linguistic and communicative competence development

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In order to understand the concept of linguistic development and linguistic competence one needs to remember that before Piaget's (1926) theory of the development of thinking and talking, it is commonly believed that children's development does not, in fact, take place, and it is only after children start to talk that they develop. The representative of the latter standpoint is, for instance, Vygotsky (1989) – and not to undermine the role of Chomsky's (1986) writings regarding the creative character of children's language, which is considerable indeed.

Foreign language discourse coparticipants tend to employ one or more skills simultaneously switching, if and when necessary, from one role and skill to another (for instance, from speaking to listening and then back to speaking again) or they may well employ several skills simultaneously (for instance, in a school life situation, that would be listening to the teacher and writing what they are saying). Equally important as the aforementioned language skills, however, is also the knowledge of phonological, grammatical and lexical resources alike – made use of whenever successful communication is achieved[1]– although, Li[2] admits" anguage in language classrooms is not only the subject matter – lexis, structure

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[1] G. Cook, *Discourse*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989.

[2] L. Li, *Obstacles and opportunities for developing thinking through interaction in language classrooms*, Thinking Skills and Creativity 6/2011, 146-158.

and phonology – but a tool to achieve meaning co-construction, where a degree of thinking skill is required; for instance, being critical, open to other ideas, collaborative, imaginative and independent in learning activities." With regard to communication itself, Jastrzębska[3], following Weiss (1984), speaks of its four types as far as foreign language classes are taken into consideration; that is it can be:

1) teaching-related,
2) imitated,
3) simulated and
4) authentic.

Whatever the nature of the changes and innovations in the development of competing language teaching ideologies which has taken place throughout language teaching methods and approaches history – their implications are, as a matter of fact, strictly connected with the recognition of the kind of proficiency that learners need: the replacement of reading comprehension with oral proficiency (when mainstream language teaching embraces the growing interest in communicative approaches to language teaching) can serve as one of the major trends only.

Indeed, the way that L2 is taught and learnt has been in a constant state of flux, and the reason why it is so is pertinently grasped by Hinkel[4].

[i]n the past 15 years or so, several crucial factors have combined to affect current perspectives on the teaching of English worldwide: (a) the decline of methods, (b) a growing emphasis on both bottom-up and top-down skills, (c) the creation of new knowledge about English, and (d) integrated and contextualized teaching of multiple language skills. In part because of its comparatively short history as a discipline, TESOL has been and continues to be a dynamic field, one in which new venues and perspectives are still unfolding. The growth of new knowledge about the how and the what of L2 teaching and learning is certain to continue and will probably remain the hallmark of TESOL's disciplinary maturation.

The most active period in the history of approaches and methods is from the 1950s to the 1980s; after that period, the notion of approaches and methods comes into criticism and the term post-methods era has frequently been applied ever

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[3] E. Jastrzębska, *Strategie psychodydaktyki twórczości w kształceniu językowym (na przykładzie języka francuskiego)*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków 2011, p. 119.

[4] E. Hinkel, *Current perspectives on teaching the four skills*, TESOL Quarterly, 40(1)/2006, p. 109-131.

since. Notwithstanding that fact, after the 1980s, it is still interaction, "the most important element in the curriculum"[5], that stands for the core of second language learning and pedagogy theories because learners learn the structure of a language through interaction rather than learning grammar in order to interact[6]. Rivers[7], to give an example, defines it (i.e. interaction) in the following manner: "students achieve facility in using a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages (that is, messages that contain information of interest to both speaker and listener in a situation of importance to both). That is interaction." Heller[8] later expands the notion of discourse in interaction to school settings as well, and shows examples of three ways in which the processes of social and cultural production and reproduction – "the maintenance or transformation of relations of power and of social boundaries and categories" – are involved, too.

First, the value attached to linguistic varieties shows up in the judgements made about the intellectual competence of their users (individually and collectively), judgements which are based on the use of elements of these varieties in all kinds of interactional performances. Second, the social organization of discourse itself (who gets to talk when, for example) allows certain actors to exercise such judgements over others, to control access to educational interactions where knowledge is constructed, and to control what gets to count as knowledge. Third, the structure of discourse generally indexes frames of reference which must be shared in order for an activity (like, say, learning) to be considered to be taking place; the ability of participants to build such shared frames on the basis of normatively conventionalized discourse structures affects their ability to do the work of doing "learning" together, to display their activity to each other, and to make appropriate judgements on the basis of the behaviour displayed.

According to Li[9], "sociocultural analysis of language use and interaction patterns in EFL classrooms suggests how teachers facilitate or obstruct learner partic-

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[5] L. Van Lier, *Interaction in the language curriculum. Awareness, autonomy and authenticity*, Longman, Harlow 1996, p. 5.

[6] E. Hatch, *Discourse and language education*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

[7] W. M. Rivers (ed.), *Interactive language teaching*, Cambridge 1987, p. 4.

[8] M. Heller, *Discourse and interaction*, in: D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis*, (2008), p. 250-264.

[9] L. Li, *Obstacles and opportunities for developing thinking through interaction in language classrooms*, op. cit., s. 146-158.

ipation, negotiation and meaning co-construction, in selected classroom episodes." The dynamics of particular interaction levels, from Callo's point of view (2006), creates appropriate upbringing character on: communicative, personal, historic, empirical, structural, interactional, and systemic levels whereas, talking of teachers, Jastrzębska[10] addresses the following fourteen activities of an effective and authentic contemporary foreign language teacher who, in her opinion, should:

1. concentrate on both the learning process and the person learning;
2. formulate clearly teaching goals defined not only on the basis of curricular documents but, first and foremost, students' needs analysis;
3. involve students in the organisation and evaluation of the learning process and its results;
4. encourage students to ask questions (develop cognitive curiosity);
5. follow the 'teach how to learn' principle;
6. skilfully support the student in his/her decision-making regarding their own learning strategies;
7. ask students for return information regarding the teaching process: opinions (also critical remarks), suggestions and ideas;
8. motivate the student to take responsibility for their own learning;
9. expect that the student acquires knowledge and skills through discovery and reflection, asking questions, formulating and checking hypotheses;
10. assist him/her in seeking and using effectively sources of information so as to solve a problem or perform a task;
11. emphasize the creative process of problem-solving, requiring two types of thinking: divergent and convergent;
12. train students to effective cooperation with others in learning and solving problematic situations;
13. develop communication in class – take care of learning in action and interaction with others (teacher – students, teacher – group, student – student, group – group);
14. develop the climate of openness, trust and interest in another man.

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[10] E. Jastrzębska, *Strategie psychodydaktyki twórczości w kształceniu językowym (na przykładzie języka francuskiego)*, op. cit., s. 84.

Li conducts her research in order to "illustrate features of classroom interaction in EFL classrooms where teachers facilitate or obstruct opportunities to develop learners' thinking skills" [11]. The data for it come from a data pool consisting of 18 video-recorded EFL lessons of both lower secondary and upper secondary Chinese students, with their English levels ranging from lower intermediate to upper-intermediate. The data are gathered during 2005-2009 for the purpose of some larger research project – all participating schools being state schools from 4 different local education authorities, and its aim, as Li puts it, is "to improve teachers' understanding of the nature of classroom, their roles in developing autounmous learners and promoting meaning co-construction in language classrooms. [12]" Li's findings are of tripartite character and suggest that:

1) "language classrooms are complex social and discourse communities, where teachers can create, develop, manage and navigate space for developing thinking skills through classroom interaction",

2) "it is the teacher who manages the turn-taking and -giving in such classroom discourse and how teachers manage turns is closely associated with pedagogical goals", and, finally

3) "thinking activities can be identified by examining the role of language in classroom activities" [13].

All in all, the study of learning competencies and skills is and, inevitably, will remain the area of particular attention – one of the world's fastest growing industries and priorities [14] in constant need of negotiation, modification, rephrasing and experimentation, especially in the era of intercultural communication and cross-cultural analysis with the first notion implying, according to Scollon and Scollon [15], "the study of distinct cultural or other groups in interaction with each other", and the latter that "the groups under study are often presupposed." The above findings are reported to be noticed and included in a list (with appropriate instances) of "The benefits of second language study" – a report drawn up by

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[11] L. Li, *Obstacles and opportunities for developing thinking through interaction in language classrooms*, op. cit., s. 155.

[12] Ibidem, s. 149.

[13] Ibidem, c. 155.

[14] A. Rylatt, K. Lohan, *Creating training miracles*, Prentice Hall, Sydney 1997.

[15] R. Scollon, S.W. Scollon, *Discourse and intercultural communication*, in: D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis,* 2008, p. 539.

National Endowment for the Arts. As its authors present it, research shows that second language study in general:

–   narrows achievement gaps,
–   benefits basic skills development,
–   benefits higher order, abstract and creative thinking,
–   (early) enriches and enhances cognitive development,
–   enhances a student's sense of achievement,
–   helps students score higher on standardized tests,
–   promotes cultural awareness and competency,
–   improves chances of college acceptance, achievement and attainment,
–   enhances career opportunities,
–   benefits understanding and security in community and society.

The implications drawn from different standpoints that relate to various creativity teaching conceptions are significant as they stand for an indispensable requirement for progress in foreign language learning although "developing thinking skills cannot be achieved by simple recourse to features of classroom talk, but if we hope to deepen our understanding the connection between language learning and thinking skills, we need to pay close attention to what is happening between the teacher and learners when language is regarded as both a subject and a tool", Li concludes[16].

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Szmidt manages to find some common characteristics, or, rather, synthesis as far as the notion of creativity is concerned – as he admits:

1) creativity development is a response to contemporary civilization and culture challenges,

2) creativity teaching takes a critical look at contemporary education, school and teachers,

3) creativity development aims at creative and innovative people,

4) creativity is perceived as a constant feature,

5) teaching creativity does not only stand for cognitive processes (creative thinking) stimulation,

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[16]   L. Li, *Obstacles and opportunities for developing thinking through interaction in language classrooms*, op. cit., s. 156.

6) creativity teaching methods refer to other than traditional principles and norms of pedagogic conduct,

7) creativity can be taught during separate classes or during already existing subjects' enrichment,

8) didactics of creativity needs to draw on creativity trainings, and, finally,

9) operationalization degree of general educational aims varies.

Summary

The article refers to Li's (2011: 155) research conducted so as to "illustrate features of classroom interaction in EFL classrooms where teachers facilitate or obstruct opportunities to develop learners' thinking skills". The data for it, gathered during 2005-2009, come from a data pool consisting of 18 video-recorded EFL lessons of both lower secondary and upper secondary Chinese students, with their English levels ranging from lower intermediate to upper-intermediate.

Li's (2011: 155) findings are of tripartite character and suggest that:

  1) *"language classrooms are complex social and discourse communities",*

  2) *"it is the teacher who manages the turn-taking and -giving in such classroom discourse" and, finally*

  3) *"thinking activities can be identified by examining the role of language in classroom activities".*