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Towards a receptive paradigm in foreign language teaching

Hasanbey Ellidokuzoğlu
Turkish Armed Forces
hasanbey59@gmail.com

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Corresponding author:
hasanbey59@gmail.com

Abstract: There are a growing number of language teaching experts and practitioners who assert that the Communicative Language Teaching has failed to meet the expectations of language teachers and students. The article attributes this failure to the theories of "language" and of "language learning" underlying the Communicative Language Teaching. Particularly problematic in this regard is the general human learning theory of "cognitivism", which, when applied to language teaching, encourages production practice from the very beginning on the basis of the domain-general assumption that practice makes perfect. Studies on language acquisition, however, have demonstrated that when learners are allowed to remain silent at the beginning level and are given ample amount of input, their subsequent language development is much faster and healthier. Currently, there is a paradigm shift in the making, a shift towards receptive methodologies. Research highlights the importance of receptive experience in language development via extensive listening and reading, and strongly suggests that use of our general learning ability does not work well for language acquisition. Rather, optimal language acquisition, first and second, is the result of the functioning of a domain specific mental capacity nourished via rich receptive experience, not through premature production practice.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching; paradigm shift; language acquisition; modularity; receptive skills.*

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of foreign language teaching, three major methods have been dominant: the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), the Audiolingual Method (ALM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The moves from GTM to ALM, and from ALM to CLT can be viewed as major paradigm shifts realized to achieve success in teaching foreign languages. It looks like, however, that the latest paradigm represented by CLT has not produced the desired result as there are a growing number of language teaching experts and teachers who have articulated their discontent with CLT (Andrewes, 2005; Bax, 2003; Sheen, 1994; Swan, 1985), a methodology which is "currently in the process of being packaged up in readiness for the dustbin of history" (Hunter & Smith, 2012, p. 430).

On the eve of a potential paradigm shift in foreign language teaching, we need to understand what went wrong with the previous one(s) and refrain from the mistakes made by CLT (and its predecessors). There is no single, monolithic CLT as it "means different things to different people" (Harmer, 2007, p. 69). It is no surprise therefore, that there have been a variety of explanations as to why CLT has "failed to fulfill its promise" (Sheen, 1994, p. 127). The

underlying reasons for failure cited in the literature range from a less heavy emphasis on grammar to cultural factors such as production-oriented CLT's inappropriateness in Confucian Heritage Communities, where silence is considered golden. Accordingly, the suggestions for solutions vary from a heavier emphasis on "focus on form [but not on forms]"(Long, 1988, p. 136) to context-dependent language teaching (Bax, 2003; Saengboon, 2006). In other words, there is a considerable level of confusion as to what the source of problem is, and how to solve it. This paper is an attempt to seek the roots of the problem in the underlying theoretical approach of CLT and its predecessors (namely, their theories of language and of language learning).

2. Language Theory of CLT: Communicative Competence

Before analyzing the highly controversial issues concerning the language theory underlying CLT, an analogy will be made to clarify the main line of argumentation, i.e. to extract the main issues out of the chaos of trivia: In the early 1970's, British officials were alarmed with the increasing number of traffic accidents caused by foreign drivers. The problem did not exist with those foreigners who got their first driver's license (L1) in England but with those who had received their L1 in countries with right-hand traffic. To solve this problem, the British officials thought it necessary that a new driving course ought to be designed by means of which non-native drivers would get a second license (L2) for driving safely in England. The government undertook this plan and assigned two experts of English License Training (ELT) to design the course: Henry Littlefit and Stephen Bird. Before Henry and Stephen actually designed the course, they had a long discussion about the main principles. Their discussion was as follows:

Stephen: I think the reason why foreign drivers drive unsafely in England is because of their left-hand driving skill, which is unsuitable for the left-hand traffic in England. To pick up an "L2", they basically need to master right-hand driving skill. If we focus on this problem in our new course, I believe traffic accidents by foreign drivers will be greatly reduced.

Henry: I believe this is just one part of a bigger problem. Driving is a much more complex skill involving more than a proper orientation. The ability to interpret English traffic signs in their proper context is at least as important as having a right-hand driving skill.

Stephen: You are right. But, our non-native drivers already know the meanings of traffic signs, which they learned while obtaining their L1. There is no need to teach those universal signs again.

Henry: You cannot say that they are all universal. For instance, the "STOP" sign is not the same in every country. Other countries use a different word for the word "STOP".

Stephen: Yes, but all stop signs are six-sided almost everywhere in the world. So even if they cannot understand the meaning of stop, they know it means "STOP" by the shape of the sign. I don't think more than a small percentage of accidents are caused by such differences.

Henry: The percentages are not important. What I want to emphasize is the complexity of driving, and the urgent need to set up an authentic exercise field where there are genuine English cars, houses, schools and even English pedestrians. Only then will they be able to realize the real meaning of traffic rules in England and learn how to drive safely in England. You're oversimplifying the complex task of driving. We need to teach driving as a totally new skill in its new context.

Such a debate has probably never taken place but, even if it had, it is highly unlikely that British officials would follow Henry's advice and set up a driving course where they make foreigners practice those aspects of driving that they have already mastered, while the real problem stems from improper orientation. In the field of foreign language teaching, however, a

similar discussion has taken (and is still taking) place (see the discussion between Swan (1985) and Widdowson (1985) for a typical example) and many educational institutions and teacher training programs around the world have opted for a methodology (i.e. CLT) which tries to put the emphasis on those aspects of language already mastered by L2 learners.

This undue emphasis is an offshoot of the underlying theory of language adopted by CLT. Ever since the British Council adopted CLT as its basic approach to language teaching in the early 1970's (Richards, 1984, p.16), Dell Hymes' theory of Communicative Competence (CC) has become one of the most fashionable ideas in foreign language teaching. The literature has witnessed repeated instances of the assertion that knowledge of language is not simply the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, but that linguistic competence is just one portion of a larger competence, which also includes pragmatic, discourse (and also strategic) competencies. The importance of discourse-pragmatic rules are exaggerated to such an extent that the under-emphasis on these rules in formal classroom context is presented as the major reason for the ineffectiveness of foreign language teaching:

> *Communicative language teaching stresses that in order to be effective language users, learners need to know about more than the formal system of the target language—they must also know how to use the language in socially appropriate ways. (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009, p. 6)*

We have been told that even when an L2 learner knows the grammatical and lexical (i.e. linguistic) aspects of an utterance, s-he may not decipher its intended, contextual meaning without the aid of discourse-pragmatic (socio-linguistic) rules:

> *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 put to communicative use. (Widdowson, 1978, p. 18-19)*

For instance, the statement "It is hot in here" might be a neutral comment, a request, a warning, an invitation to take off clothes, or what-not, depending on the context in which the statement is uttered. And its proper interpretation cannot be achieved through an analysis of its lexical and grammatical content only. In that sense, Hymes' CC is more comprehensive than other linguistic theories (including Chomsky's), which basically limit themselves to the morpho-syntactic domain.

From a linguistic perspective, of course, there is nothing wrong with this broader and more comprehensive view of language. After all, it is apparent that the same utterance might have different meanings in varying contexts in every language. What is less apparent, however, is whether a significant portion of L2 learners' problems in learning a new language stem from such discourse/pragmatic factors.

Any L2 learner of normal intelligence would have no major difficulty in interpreting the statement "It is hot in here" as a request, when it is uttered by a sweating person pointing to a window. After all, a literal translation of this statement would probably have the same contextual meaning in his/her own language. If s-he were to misinterpret the speaker's real intention, then s-he would probably commit the same mistake in his/her L1 as well. That is, context-dependent utterance interpretation rules are, to a large extent, universal like traffic signs and "main categories of communicative acts … are available in any community" (Rose & Kasper, 2001, p. 5). What is language-specific and needs to be mastered in learning a new language is its grammar and lexicon (like left/right-hand driving orientation in our analogy). As long as an L2 learner decodes grammatical and lexical content of incoming input using his/her linguistic competence, s-he will rarely have difficulty in assigning its contextual meaning:

> *Foreigners have mother tongues: they know as much as we do about how human beings communicate. The 'rules of use' that determine how we interpret utterances ..... are mostly non-language-specific, and amount to little more than the operation of experience and common sense. The precise value of an utterance is given by the interaction of its structural and lexical meaning with the situation in which it is used. (Swan, 1985, p. 5)*

This does not necessarily imply that we should design our L2 courses with a major focus on grammatical structures (an issue which will be discussed later in the article). The argument here is that basing our language teaching practice upon the premises of CC is invalid. It is one thing to assert that communication would be incomplete without discourse/pragmatic competence, yet another thing to claim that foreign language teaching would be incomplete if these discourse/pragmatic rules are not taught to students (who already know nearly all of them). Following a line of reasoning similar to that of CLT advocates, one might as well claim that we should teach our students how to send messages from their language centers (like the Broca's area) in their brains to the articulators, a kind of (neuro)linguistic competence without which even communicative competence is almost useless. Teaching of discourse-pragmatic rules is not much more relevant than the teaching of such neurolinguistic rules, both of which are automatically handled by the brain/minds of every normal human being, including L2 learners.

There are of course some discourse/pragmatic rules that show variation from one language/culture to another, such as some turn-taking conventions (e.g. overlapping is not so appropriate in some cultures, like Japanese, whereas it might be a sign of friendly-talk in others). But such culture-specific rules hardly constitute the major problem of L2 teaching and learning. In most cases L2 acquirers have enough knowledge to discover the inappropriateness of, say overlapping in Japanese, as this is also inappropriate at least when talking to superiors in most cultures. Just like the non-native driver in England who can read the shape of "stop sign" (if not the word "stop" itself) using his/her prior knowledge of traffic rules, an L2 acquirer of Japanese would infer that "overlapping" is quite restricted in his/her target language as compared to his/her L1. And even if they do not, that is, even when non-natives do not exactly conform with the social appropriacy rules in the target language community, native speakers are reported to exercise considerable tolerance toward such mistakes when they realize that their interlocutors are non-natives, whose "diverging behavior may be seen as unproblematic or even particularly likeable" (Kasper, 1997, p. 117).

In short, Communicative Competence might be an insightful "linguistic" theory in explaining how language works in a broader social context but it seems to be not so helpful in determining the main goals in foreign language teaching and learning. If the main aim in the aforementioned driving course is the mastery of proper orientation in getting an English License, then in language learning the main aim should be the acquisition of linguistic competence, i.e. that part of communicative competence which does not exist in the minds of L2 learners (not those parts that they already know).

3. Learning Theory of CLT: Cognitivism

Of the two theories underlying CLT's approach, learning theory is of more practical value and is more responsible for the level of success (or failure) experienced, than the language theory that we have covered so far. After all, the impact of the theory of language assumed by the Communicative Approach (i.e. CC) is not felt very strongly beyond the syllabus construction process, during which CLT-oriented course book writers prepare hybrid syllabi of notions and

functions combined with structural elements of linguistic competence. As notional-functional aspects of the syllabi (representing discourse-pragmatic aspects of CC) have already been mastered by learners, the major emphasis in actual classroom practice is placed once again on teaching the elements of linguistic competence (which has always been the case throughout the history of foreign language teaching).

It is basically the linguistic competence which really matters but, as has been mentioned before, the importance of linguistic competence should not necessarily lead us to a grammar-oriented language teaching methodology. Although grammar (and vocabulary) is a central target, the question is "how best to arrive it" (Baretta, 1987, p. 85). At this point the role of learning theory comes into play. After all, it is the learning theory underlying a method which specifies how the language content must be presented by teachers and mastered by students. And this is the soft belly of CLT, which gives birth to major problems.

CLT theorists are not very clear on their perspective on language learning. Since "little has been written about learning theory" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 161), this theoretical void has been filled by one of the most common learning theories of recent times: Cognitivism (Thornbury, 2006, p. 172). It is at this point that the new paradigm represented by CLT has taken another wrong turn, which ultimately led to the same trap that the GTM and the ALM had fallen into. Despite some differences among themselves, representatives of these three major methodologies (i.e. GTM, ALM and CLT) view language acquisition as an instance of general human learning, rather than adopting a domain-specific approach which would respect the unique nature of language acquisition.

In fact, cognitivism is a powerful learning theory in the field of psychology, which explains a lot about general human learning. Problems arise, however, when it is applied to the unique domain of language acquisition. Cognitivism views human "brind" (brain and/or mind) as a homogeneous mechanism processing language using the very same domain-general principles that are used in other cognitive domains. Such a domain-general approach is not only peculiar to cognitivism but observed also in earlier learning theories which laid the foundations of CLT's predecessors. With its "tabula rasa" perspective, for instance, behaviorism (the learning theory underlying ALM) denied the presence of any domain-specific mental capacity for language processing as well:

> *Neither the Piagetian [cognitivist] nor the behaviorist theory grants the infant any innate structures or domain-specific knowledge. Each grants only some domain-general ... processes .... [which] are held to apply across all areas of linguistic and non-linguistic cognition. (Karmiloff-Smith, 1995, p. 7)*

Similarly, GTM's obsession about teaching verb conjugations reminiscent of the style of teaching multiplication tables in math classes reflects the same domain-general mentality. According to all these domain-general learning theories, learning math or any other skill (like driving, touch-typing, etc) are basically similar to learning a (second) language. Here is a typical cognitivist account of SLA:

> *To learn a second language is to learn a skill, because various aspects of the task must be practiced and integrated into fluent performance. This requires the automatization of component subskills (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 133)*

This cogntivist perspective underlies the PPP (Presentation, Production & Practice), which is the most common version of CLT in the language teaching market (Stern, 1992, p. 188; Thornbury, 2006, p. 37). PPP is the embodiment of cognitivism in language teaching, a methodology in which target structures are presented, practiced and produced as if the mastery of

linguistic rules were fundamentally similar to the mastery of the rules of math. Such a PPP approach is not very different from the behavioristic ALM since "the idea that 'practice makes perfect' is fundamental to cognitive learning theory" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 173) as well.

From a learning theory perspective, therefore, the move from GTM to ALM and from ALM to CLT do not represent major paradigm shifts since all three methodologies have tried to exploit the general human learning mechanism instead of activating the language specific system in the human brind. It is quite likely that the causal factor which was responsible for the GTM's and the ALM's failure, is now at work undermining the CLT. If this theoretical perspective problem is not solved in the post-CLT era, it is likely that vicious cycle of successive unsuccessful methodologies would not be broken and that the upcoming paradigm shift would lead to yet another stillbirth in foreign language teaching. The basic argument in this paper is that the failure experienced in CLT-based methods (and its predecessors) stem from their domain-general approach ignoring the peculiar nature of language acquisition, a process which is handled by an innate device specifically designed to process and produce language in its own way.

4. Unique Nature of Language Acquisition

The claim that language has a life of its own within human brind is not a new one. Its roots can be traced back to the 19th century when patients with a specific type of brain-damage were found to have lost some of their language skills while their non-linguistic cognitive capacities remained intact. The mismatch between linguistic and non-linguistic cognitive capacities are further confirmed by people with Chatterbox or William's Syndrome, who display advanced language skills in spite of serious mental problems (Cromer, 1991). A curious case in this regard is that of Christopher, a linguistic savant who, despite his severe mental problems, "can read, write and communicate in any of fifteen to twenty languages" (Smith & Tsimpli, 1995, p. 1). Such cases fly in the face of cognitivism, which views brind as a homogenous system having no room for an independently functioning language module.

Even more compelling evidence in favor of an innately-wired, independently functioning, domain-specific linguistic mechanism comes from child language acquisition. Despite their systematic and collaborative studies over a century, linguists have not decoded the grammar of any human language in its entirety yet, using their advanced cognitive capacities (i.e. their domain-general problem solving skills), while a single child decodes (and starts using) the very same grammar of his/her mother tongue within a few years. This urges many linguists to attribute children's amazing linguistic accomplishment to the presence of an inborn linguistic capacity in human genetic make-up:

> *[W]e're struck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the expressive variety of language demands a complex mental grammar that linguists can't entirely figure out. But on the other hand, children manage to acquire this grammar. Thus, in a sense the Genetic Hypothesis is a move of desperation … it's the only answer anybody has been able to think of. (Jackendoff, 1993, p. 33)*

According to these nativist linguists, it is thanks to a domain-specific language system (which is generally referred to as the Language Acquisition Device-LAD) that children outperform adult linguists in deciphering the complexities of language and become successful in reaching full attainment in first language acquisition.

From a cognitivist perspective, however, the resort to a domain-specific device for language acquisition is not plausible as it violates one of the basic principles of scientific

philosophizing called *Occam's Razor*, which urges scientists to seek simplicity in their theories. With a single powerful learning mechanism which handles any type of learning including language acquisition, cognitive theory looks like more compatible with Occam's Razor. In other words, cognitivism seems to meet the simplicity requirement while nativism sounds "ad hoc" with many of its domain-specific modules (one for language, another for music, etc.) in addition to a general learning system.

Cognitivists, in fact, do not negate the presence of innate principles as long as they are valid across domains; their reaction is towards the domain-specific innate knowledge or mechanisms. In his famous discussion with Chomsky, Piaget (1980) suggested that "If one wants to introduce innateness into language, why not introduce it into the symbolic function in its totality, and finally into anything that is general" (p. 167) reflecting his domain-general cognitivist perspective.

In fact, Chomsky also respects Occam's Razor as evidenced in his "minimalist" attempts to seeks economy (thus simplicity) within the language domain (Chomsky, 1995). But Chomsky and other nativist linguists underline the significance of explanatory power before meeting the simplicity condition of Occam's Razor: in order for competing theories in a given domain to be tested on the simplicity ground, they first need to be able to "account for the facts" observed in that domain. That is, only after the rival theories are equal in terms of their explanatory power can we use Occam Razor's simplicity requirement as a litmus test in ruling out the more complex (or cumbersome) theories. At this point, nativists assert that cognitivism cannot account for the amazing speed of children in acquiring their mother tongue(s). Left to his/her "immature" domain-general cognitive capacities, no child would be able to decipher the complex grammar rules of his/her L1 within a lifetime:

> *[A] child may well not have grasped the property of conservation of volume nor be able to perform but the most rudimentary arithmetic calculations, yet will have the knowledge linguists formulate as the binding principles, none of which is explicitly taught (Carston, 1988, p. 41).*

Even if the child had the mature cognitive capacity of a highly intelligent adult, the nativist assumption would be reasonable since a large community of highly intelligent linguists have not deciphered the grammar of any human language in its entirety yet. The question to be asked here is "why not?" If there is just a single learning mechanism (like the domain-general learning system of the cognitivists) responsible for all types of learning, then both linguists and children should be using the very same mechanism in dealing with language. Considering the collaborative studies of linguists, there is much more (domain-general) cognitive capacity involved and thousands of times more linguistic data available to the linguists, as compared to a child working singlehandedly on his/her L1. If both sides were using the same mechanism (and there is only "one" mechanism according to cognitivism), linguists should spend much less time than a single, cognitively immature child to discover the underlying grammar rules of a language, while the case is exactly the opposite. The only plausible explanation for this paradox is that children and linguists are exploiting "different" mechanisms: (a) linguists are using their domain-general cognitive system for their conscious/explicit analysis of grammar and (b) children are tapping their LAD. Without the help of a rich mechanism like the LAD, acquisition of a language by children would not be just difficult but next-to-impossible, according to nativist linguists:

> *Language is not merely difficult to learn with only general cognitive strategies, it is virtually impossible. This is one important reason for attributing an innate domain-specific language faculty to children. (Bley-Vroman, 1989, p. 44)*

5. LAD in second language acquisition (SLA)

The ongoing debate between the nativists and cognivists is nothing more than a theoretical issue having almost no practical value from a child language acquisition perspective. Unaffected by who is right or wrong in this debate, children just keep picking up their mother tongue(s) as they always do. This is like the discussion among the astronomers as to whether Pluto is a planet or not. No matter how they categorize it, Pluto continues to revolve around the sun as always.

When it comes to "second or foreign" language learning and teaching, however, the discussion between the two camps gets utterly important: depending on which side is more dominant, language teaching practices around the globe are shaped accordingly. Coursebooks and teacher training programs are designed in line with the principles of the dominant perspective. And for the last a hundred plus years, the dominant perspective in the field of foreign language teaching has been shaped by non-nativist theories, all of which have been reluctant to accept the presence of mental or cognitive instincts in human brind, including the LAD. Despite some differences, behaviorism and cognitivism (the learning theories of ALM and CLT, respectively) are alike in view of the fact that "[n]either the Piagetian [cognitivist] nor the behaviorist theory grants the infant any innate structures or domain-specific knowledge" (Karmiloff-Smith, 1995, p. 7).

5.1 Critical period hypothesis (CPH) and the vicious cycle

The influence of cognitivist theories is felt even more strongly in foreign language teaching since many nativists, who believe in the existence of the LAD in child language acquisition, join the cognitivist camp when they try to explain post-pubescent SLA. In other words, both cognitivists and (many) nativists believe that adults or adolescents have only one mechanism to learn a new language: the domain-general learning system with which we learn math and all other skills. Therefore, the LAD which is supposed to be the key to success in child language acquisition, is hypothesized to atrophy after a critical age, and learners in formal instruction environments are supposed to learn the rules of their L2 as if they are dealing with any other complex skill.

A fundamental argument in favor of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is based on the common failure observed in post-pubescent L2 learning. While children experience almost no difficulty in their effortless acquisition of a new language, adults seem to spend years or even decades to learn an L2 without reaching ultimate attainment, most of the time. The curious thing, here, is that this common failure is observed most typically in educated societies, where adults or adolescents try to learn an L2 in the formal context of classrooms. In the uneducated societies of the third-world, however, successful bilinguals or even polyglots are quite common. In the highly multilingual areas of Africa and South America, "where almost every individual is polylingual" (Sorensen, 1967, p. 670), people do acquire other languages through natural techniques without any resort to formal instruction:

> *Perhaps there is no place in the world where so many people speak more than one language than in Africa…. In learning various African languages these people have never enjoyed the presumed benefits of printed grammars, … or instruction in how to learn other languages, …. This African way of language learning is ultimately the best way to*

acquire a foreign tongue, for it is the natural way—the way children learn. (Nida, 1982, p. 42)

In fact, the natural way mentioned above is not peculiar to African people only. People all over the world who follow the same "natural" path in learning an L2 are entitled to rekindle the victory of children or of multilingual African people. To give a specific example from the literature Julie, an American lady married to an Egyptian man, is one such successful L2 learner who acquired Arabic after puberty through natural means without instruction. Even in the field of native-like accent attainment, which is not considered necessary in critical period discussions, she managed to develop an almost accent-free speech in her L2. More than half of Arabic native speakers (8 out of 13) listening to her voice on audiotape thought she was a native speaker of Arabic (Ioup, Boustagui, El Tigi & Moselle, 1994), which lends further support to the assumption that post-pubescent L2 learners "do" have access to the very same mechanism that children enjoy.

Julie is one of thousands of successful L2 learners throughout the world who have achieved native-like proficiency in L2, learners whose mere presence weakens the CPH. Nonetheless, the presence of millions of other post-pubescent learners who cannot attain success despite their best efforts in formal/instructed L2 learning contexts needs to be accounted for, as well. If the LAD is available in post-puberty learners' brinds, why can some tap it while others can't? The answer is probably hidden in the context or the methodology of language teaching: it is highly likely that the "common failure" problem stems from the "common" language teaching practices in the educated societies, where languages are taught by using misguided methods which do not make use of the natural linguistic capacity. In other words, the commonly applied methods such as GTM, ALM and CLT, whose underlying approach is based on the denial of innate language system, have produced unsuccessful learners. And the case of these "failed" learners further reinforced the belief in CPH. There seems to be a vicious cycle going on here; the denial produces the failure, the failure fuels further denial. And those living outside this vicious cycle are living in the oases of multilingualism, like the ones in Africa or South America.

There have been some theorists who argue that this vicious cycle can be broken by applying proper methodologies and a main aim in this paper is to highlight their ideas whose influence has so far remained marginal in the language teaching practice, if not in its literature. Nativist theorists such as Stephen Krashen, Sascha Felix and Marvin Brown have always maintained that "adults can access the same natural language acquisition device that children use" (Krashen, 1982, p. 10) but that success depends on the methodology that L2 learners follow.

5.2 Acquisition-Learning distinction

According to Krashen, adults or adolescents can follow two distinct paths in developing competence in a second language: acquisition and learning. Acquisition is a subconscious process handled by the LAD and triggered by exposure to comprehensible input. It is the process through which learners (or more properly, "acquirers") like Julie attain success in SLA.

Learning, on the other hand, is the process of consciously analyzing the rules of an L2, using the very same domain-general mechanism (of the cognitivists) that we all exploit in learning math or any other skill. The problems that we experience in language learning/teaching emanate basically from methodologies like GTM, ALM and CLT used in classroom language teaching, all of which have so far followed the "learning" path, on the assumption that there is only one mechanism to learn everything, including language. This explains why African people

are superior in picking up new languages: they are free from the adverse effects of misguided methodologies as they acquire their L2 outside the classroom context.

Classroom context per se, however, is not necessarily a bad place to acquire a language according to Krashen. Provided that formal instruction is properly designed in line with the principles of acquisition, one can acquire a new language faster in class than s-he can in the natural environment. If classroom teaching practice provides ample amount of comprehensible (and preferably compelling) input, then formal learners can even outperform naturalistic learners like Julie. But if classroom is a place where learners try to consciously practice rules of their L2 as if they are studying math, then the end result is doomed to be less than satisfactory.

Krashen's ideas have so far been marginalized by the dominant cognitivist perspective, which views conscious learning and subconscious acquisition not as two distinct processes, but as two closely related functions of the same underlying mechanism. The common belief is that conscious learning represents the initial phase which is followed by subconscious acquisition after sufficient amount of practice. Krashen, on the other hand, hypothesizes that acquisition is handled by an independently functioning LAD, whose processing is impenetrable through conscious learning/teaching attempts, being susceptible only to comprehensible input. He formulates this impenetrability principle in his oft-criticized statement "Learning does not become acquisition". This brings us to the "Interface versus Non-Interface" controversy, which lies at the core of major discussions in our field.

5.3 Interface versus non-interface discussion

Krashen claims that consciously learned rules of an L2 (Learned Competence=LC) cannot enter into one's subconscious storage (i.e. Acquired Competence=AC) through practice. LC and AC represent two distinct knowledge systems between which there exists no link or interface (Krashen, 1985). Krashen's Non-Interface Position, can be schematized as follows:

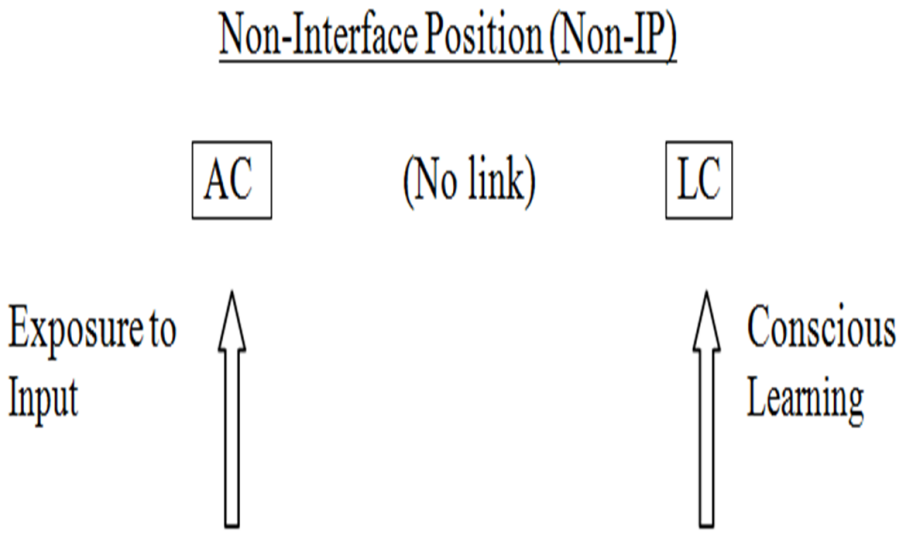

Figure 1. Non-Interface Position (Non-IP)

Cognitivist theorists, on the other hand, believe that consciously learned rules can become subconsciously acquired through practice. This is called the Interface Position, which is schematized below:

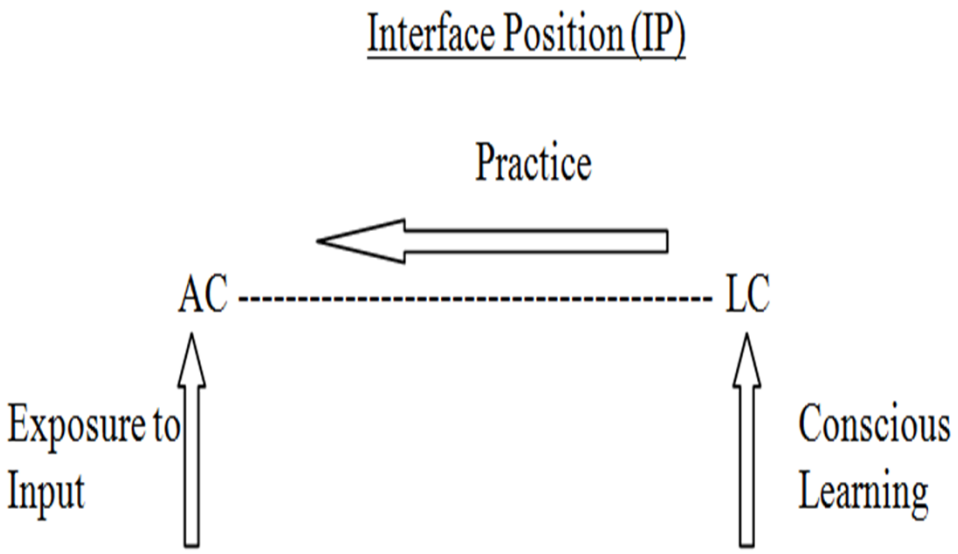

Figure 2. Interface Position (IP)

There are two pathways which lead to the development of acquired competence, according to IP. The first is through exposure to input (though the processor is the domain-general learning system, rather than the LAD). The second is through conscious learning and practicing. While the second path is the main pathway exploited in the classroom context for the cognitivist-minded IP advocates (and thus for the CLT advocates), non-IP suggests that this is a dead-end since practice does not improve acquired competence.

For many IP advocates, the transition from LC to AC is more than apparent. As a former IP advocate, Sharwood-Smith (1981), for instance, had once asserted:

> *While the empirical evidence for the impermeability and primacy of the acquisition device in the second or foreign language learners is hotly contested, there is every reason to accept the older, intuitively attractive version which says that explicit knowledge may aid acquisition via practice.(p. 167)*

The intuitive appeal of IP stems basically from the observation that L2 learners do learn certain rules first and then use these rules automatically without conscious effort, which is an indication of acquisition. The critical issue here is whether their acquisition is due to "conscious learning and practicing" or because of "exposure to input". Krashen asserts that the "learn-and-then-acquire experience" does not represent a causal relationship but a temporal one, the real cause being the input received in the meantime. By using his input hypothesis, Krashen can, in fact, account for every observation which seemingly supports IP, such as the apparent superiority of formal learners over naturalistic learners, or of elder learners over younger learners. In all cases where formal instruction is found to be beneficial, input is also there to account for the results. Enhanced comprehensibility of input is the key factor, according to Krashen, which accounts for the superiority of formal or elder learners (rather than form-focused instruction or learner's advanced cognitive capacities exploited in classroom context) (Krashen, 1985). How are we, then, to discern the real causal factor which leads to acquisition? There is one safe way to remove the confound: seek cases where one of the factors, i.e. input or conscious learning/practicing, does not work. And this leads us to examine the results of studies revealing

the natural order of acquisition, which cannot be changed through conscious teaching/learning attempts.

That some consciously learned and practiced rules do not necessarily become subconsciously acquired is shown by dozens of morpheme studies during the 1970's and quite a few other studies at the syntactic level during the 1980's (For an extensive review of related research see Ellis, 1990). These studies have all shown that no matter how grammatical structures are presented and practiced in class, L2 learners follow a universal syllabus, irrespective of their L1 background and acquire the L2 rules in a predetermined order, which is not parallel to the teaching order dictated by the teachers or course-books:

> *Formal learners develop their language stepwise despite the scheduling of the teaching [and], more importantly, in the same order as has been found for natural acquisition. (Pienemann, 1989, p. 71-72)*

There have been some attempts to account for the natural order from a cognitivist perspective on the basis of domain-general principles such as complexity, frequency, perceptual salience or processing difficulty (Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001). In such cognitivist accounts, it is implied that there is no need to talk about a domain-specific device controlling the order of language acquisition since similar orders can also be observed in other domains, orders which are the outcomes of domain-general principles rather than domain-specific ones. In learning touch-typing, for instance, the reason why certain letters are learned earlier than others is because letters such as "a" are more frequently encountered/used than letters such as "x". When an order of letter learning is found in touch-typing, no one concludes that there is a domain-specific, innate device for learning touch-typing. So, the argument goes, we should not assert the presence of a domain-specific LAD on the basis of natural order of language acquisition.

What seems to be forgotten in such an argument is that in other domains, when you increase the frequency of a certain item, you can internalize/learn it earlier than normal. For instance, if you persistently practice the "x" letter on the keyboard before you practice "a", nothing prevents you from learning "x" earlier than "a". In language acquisition, however, this is not the case (at least for certain morpho-syntactic rules). In an experimental study, Ellis (1989) tried to obtain a sequence different from the natural order by changing the order of presentation and by increasing the emphasis on late-acquired rules. Nonetheless, he found that his subjects still followed the natural order, which shows the independent functioning of the LAD, free from the influence of conscious teaching/learning:

> *A comparison of this sequence with that reported for naturalistic learners … revealed no difference, despite the fact that the order in which the rules were introduced and the degree of emphasis given to rules in the instruction differed from the naturalistic order... The results of this study support the claim that the classroom and naturalistic L2 acquisition ... follow similar routes (Ellis, 1989, p. 305).*

It was thanks to such research results that former IP advocates such as Sharwood-Smith changed their camp and eventually adopted the non-IP position:

> *Thirty years of research has not produced any really hard evidence that making people aware of formal features of the second language has any significant long-term effect on their grammatical development. (Sharwood-Smith, 2008, p.1)*

A basic reason why former IP advocates like Sharwood-Smith had to change their position was that IP could not explain why L2 learners cannot acquire simple (late-acquired) and much-practiced rules like the 3rd person singular "-s" even after extensive practice in class, an

observation which Non-IP explains with ease, thanks to the impenetrability principle mentioned above. The following is the statement of this impenetrability principle again by Sharwood-Smith:

> *The processing of the PSs [phonological structures] and SSs [syntactic structures] takes place beyond the range of conscious introspection and so any attempt to influence its operations directly, by explicit input enhancement, say, is doomed to failure, and so far this is supported by mainstream research in SLA. (ibid, pp.10-11)*

Krashen suggests that the only data that the LAD is susceptible to is comprehensible input. Once a message is understood, the LAD is automatically triggered and starts analyzing the grammatical content of the incoming messages at a subconscious level. The only way, therefore, to develop subconscious grammar (i.e. AC) is through the LAD's own processing of incoming messages, when the learner's conscious focus is on meaning, not on form. The processing of form (i.e. grammatical aspects of input) by the LAD occurs at a subconscious level and is immune to conscious intervention. This explains why L2 students experience difficulty in the classroom context; the heavy emphasis on "conscious" teaching/learning in formal grammar instruction does not provide the relevant data that triggers the LAD. Learners may develop their LC in classroom context to some degree but conscious knowledge of grammar is of little use in natural, fluent, meaningful communication:

> *The grammatical structure that our minds assemble in milliseconds on-line in order to process utterances (for production or comprehension) is absolutely inaccessible to conscious introspection. One might say that it just has to be so for extremely fast and efficient language use to be possible. (Sharwood-Smith, 2008, p. 11)*

During fast and efficient language use, people consciously focus on meaning, not on form. But grammar is still right there, in their utterances. Since the human brind can consciously focus on only one thing at a time and since the conscious focus is busy dealing with meaning (not with form) during natural communication, grammatical aspects of our utterances have to be provided automatically by our subconscious knowledge of grammar, i.e. AC. Therefore fluency in production is possible only with advanced AC, not with consciously learned rules practiced in a formal classroom context.

So the problem mentioned by Widdowson (1978), quoted above (i.e. L2 learners' inability to put their consciously learned rules into communicative use) does not necessarily stem from L2 learners' less-than-sufficient discourse-pragmatic competence but from their inadequate subconscious linguistic competence. Success in SLA can be attained when L2 learners follow the unique path of acquisition by obtaining ample amount of comprehensible input, not by trying to convert their conscious LC into subconscious AC through extensive practice. In other (non-linguistic) cognitive domains, practice may make perfect in turning consciously attained rules into automatic usage, but not in language acquisition, a process handled by a domain-specific module immune to all other types of data but comprehensible input.

5.4 Impenetrability of LAD

The reason why conscious knowledge of grammar cannot affect the acquisition process (or the LAD) can be explained through Fodor's modularity theory as well. According to Fodor (1983) a defining characteristic of domain-specific, innate modules is that they are "informationally encapsulated" (p. 37). That is, they are susceptible only to their own specific data and not to others. To give an example from the visual domain, even if you know that the

Muller-Lyer illusion shown below is an illusion, you cannot help seeing first line longer than the second:

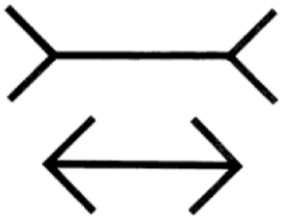

Figure 3. Muller-Lyer illusion

You may measure the two lines with a ruler to make sure that the two lines are equal in length but this conscious information about their equality (which represents irrelevant data for visual processing) cannot enter into your subconsciously functioning visual module and change its processing. There seems to be a kind of firewall around the visual module to ensure its seamless and speedy processing, free from the intervention of domain-general central processors, where conscious information resides. As is the case in vision, language is also handled by a domain-specific and informationally encapsulated module (i.e. the LAD), which does not allow conscious knowledge of grammar to change its processing.

5.5 The trigger for the LAD: Input or output?

If conscious learning and practicing cannot change the LAD's processing, the next question that comes to mind is 'What triggers the LAD, then?' The answer is input, which is the sine qua non of real language development:

> *For the knowledge system of a particular language to grow, the acquirer must have exposure to instances or exemplars of that particular language. Without such exposure language development will not take place (Schwartz, 1993, p. 148).*
>
> *[A]cquisition occurs in response only to positive evidence, that is, the language that the learner hears in his/her surrounding, ambient environment. (Piske & Young-Scholten, 2009, p. 8)*

As depicted in Figure 2 above, cognitivism also acknowledges the fact that L2 learners can develop their subconscious knowledge through exposure to input. But this confession is not reflected into practice in CLT classes. Rather than following the input route, CLT advocates tend to pursue the alternative way supposedly leading to AC development through production (or output) practice. The underlying assumption here is that production practice makes perfect and that "it is only through practice that the skill becomes automatic" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 173). However neither production practice nor grammar explanations trigger the LAD:

> *Output practice is not the data upon which the developing system relies for growth. Nor is the explanation about grammar provided by the instructor or the textbook. Explanations are information about language, but they are not the language data themselves. (VanPatten, 1996, p. 59)*

Research conducted over a course of several decades has repeatedly shown that input-based language instruction is more successful than others (Asher, 1965; Burger, 1989; Dziedzic, 2012; Hafiz & Tudor, 1990; Hammond, 1989; Işık, 2000; Lafayette & Buscaglia, 1985; Lee, 2007; Mason, 2006; Pippins & Krashen, 2016; Robb & Susser, 1989; Sari, 2013; Smith, 2006; Varguez, 2009; Watson, 2009; Wolfe & Jones, 1982—This is only a partial list; for more detailed

information on the superiority of receptive methodologies see Dupuy, 2000; Krashen, 1982, 2003).

One can, of course, assert that there is even a longer list of studies which support the superiority of form-focused or production-based instruction (Norris & Ortega, 2000). When these studies are examined closely, however, it is seen that some serious research design problems are involved and that the presumed advantage of instruction is an artifact of the instruments tailored to tap "conscious learning" not "subconscious acquisition". After analyzing research findings which seemingly support form-focused or production-based instruction, Truscott (2015) concludes that

> *probably the clearest, most consistent finding is that the success of the treatment is a function of the way that learning is measured. When the tests are amenable to the use of consciously held knowledge, particularly when they encourage learners to focus on the correct use of the instructed knowledge, the typical finding is that the instruction was very beneficial. When learners are required to demonstrate their learning [i.e. acquisition] in spontaneous, communicatively oriented tasks, where the focus is on meaning rather on the instructed form, the observed effects are quite limited ….. This is a point that Krashen has made all along …and time and further research have only served to strengthen it. (p.134)*

As Truscott notes, Krashen (2003) came to this conclusion after an examination of studies which claimed that grammar teaching works (see also Krashen, 1999). To remove potential confounds from research design, Sarı (2013) has tested Krashen's prediction that even without production practice L2 learners can proceed along the interlanguage path faster than others provided that they receive ample amount of input. In his comparison of a reception-oriented Natural Approach class with a control group going through a PPP instruction, Sarı deliberately excluded production practice and minimized grammar instruction throughout the treatment period, during which the control group received integrated-skills instruction forcing production from the beginning as advised by the CLT. The results demonstrated that the experimental group receiving input-based instruction outperformed the controls not just in receptive skills but also in productive skills plus grammar, which were not emphasized during the treatment at all. Thanks to such research results, major institutions like the Turkish military have abandoned CLT methodology and have adopted "comprehension-based approaches which are being applied in all educational institutions in Turkish Armed Forces" (Turkish Military Academy, n.d., par.1).

While the safest thing to do, in the light of all these results, is to follow the acquisition path through exposure to input (whose safety is acknowledged even by the cognitivists themselves), the common practice in the CLT-based foreign language instruction is to pursue the alternative path which goes through conscious learning and production practice (see Figure 2), a path whose existence is debatable at best.

Despite all these massive amount of research results against it, output-oriented CLT (especially its PPP version) is still the dominant methodology "in one form or another all over the world" (Harmer, 2007, p. 68). As a method which "is not directly aligned with SLA research" (Piske & Young-Scholten, 2009, p. 14), the CLT has shown indifference toward research from the very beginning;

> *British CLT did not take its inspiration from SLA research. That is partly because SLA research developed after CLT was already quite advanced, and partly because, even*

> *when more published research on SLA was available, British applied linguists sometimes had strong reservations about its relevance. (Lightbown, 2002, p. 530)*

6. Factors behind the popularity of CLT

If not theoretical vigor nor empirical support, what then is behind the popularity of CLT? There are multiple reasons why CLT has maintained its popularity for decades despite its major weaknesses. A major reason, which sometimes goes unnoticed, is economic rather than academic in nature. CLT has enjoyed not only the support of giant foreign language teaching companies which have designed their coursebooks in line with the principles of PPP, but also the support of governmental institutions with budgets of millions of pounds such as the British Council. The following remarks in an article titled "The Secret Life of Methods" is worth mentioning here:

> *The British Council has for many years served the interests of British methodologists by providing an instant and international outlet for their ideas, as well as funds to present their latest speculations at international forums and conferences. It is doubtful if communicative language teaching …. could have been established so rapidly without the Council's help. (Richards, 1984, p. 16)*

The purpose here is not to accuse British Council or any other institution for supporting this or that methodology. After all, everyone is free to support whichever method seems most effective. But, it is worth underlining the fact that, as has been experienced in other branches of science throughout history, the field of foreign language teaching is not immune to non-academic influences, which may unfortunately result in considerable waste of time, effort and human resources in teaching foreign languages.

7. Future prospects

Despite the huge economic resources behind it, the PPP version of the CLT is doomed to disappear sooner or later, due to its weaknesses explained above. The recent tendency among CLT circles is to move towards the task-based CLT (Porcaro, 2011), which is free from one of the weaknesses of the PPP: form-focused instruction. With its form-free and meaning-based instructional philosophy, task-based CLT is more in tune with the functioning of the LAD, which works best when learners' conscious focus is on meaning (not on form). However, task-based CLT falls short of providing the ideal environment for natural language acquisition as it heavily relies on production practice rather than receptive experience even in beginning-to-intermediate levels (Aslan, 2016). Again the assumption is the good old principle of "practice makes perfect", whereas the real cure should be sought in receptive experience (i.e. getting ample amount of input through extensive reading and listening), which is the only real nourishment for LAD:

> *All cases of successful first and second language acquisition are characterized by the availability of comprehensible input. (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991, p. 142)*

Successful L2 acquirers are those who receive ample amount of input before they start producing output (Postovsky, 1982). To give an iceberg analogy, the bulky part underneath the sea surface represents the amount of input one needs to receive in order to bring to the surface the tip of the iceberg, which represents one's productive capacity. The Natural Approach, TPR (Total Physical Response), TPRS (Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling), and other comprehension-oriented methodologies respect the principle of "comprehension precedes production" and allow students to keep silent during initial stages of SLA, while task-based CLT

joins PPP in their common attempt to turn the iceberg upside down by urging the students to practice from the very beginning, at a time when they have received insufficient input. In other words, task-based CLT is not much different from its sister PPP in that they both try to force production at the early stages of L2 development. Therefore, the palliative shift towards task-based CLT is not likely to bring the desired success in language teaching.

The arguments presented here suggest that real success in language teaching will be achieved with methods which would not only be form-free in their design but would also provide ample amount of input before expecting students to produce. The current excitement over task-based CLT, therefore, might result in another wrong-turn. Before jumping on yet another bandwagon, L2 teachers and learners around the globe should double-check the theoretical vigor of the new derivatives of CLT, if they do not want to lose a few more decades.

8. Conclusion

In establishing its underlying approach, CLT has borrowed the most popular theories from two parent disciplines: "Communicative Competence" from linguistics and "Cognitivism" from psychology. Despite their popularity and insightfulness in their respective fields, these two theories are shown to be either irrelevant or misleading when applied to the field of foreign language teaching.

It is predicted that real success in foreign/second language education can only be attained with methods respecting the domain-specific characteristics of language acquisition. So far, major methodologies including CLT have tried to exploit a domain-general learning mechanism which proved insufficient in deciphering the complexities of language. Until we start using our domain-specific language capacity by activating it through receptive experience rather than output practice, language teachers and students around the globe are not likely to achieve the desired level of success in teaching/learning new languages. If we are to attain efficiency in foreign language teaching, we as language teachers should design our teaching practices in light of sound theoretical reasoning inspired by research findings, not through fashionable ideas unsupported by scientific inquiry. In other words, it is high time that we stop following the CLT bandwagon and move towards a receptive paradigm, which would respect the peculiar nature of language acquisition and teaching.

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