

promoting access to White Rose research papers



Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

This is an author produced version of a paper published in **Language Learning Journal**

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/77354>

Paper:

Whong, MK (2013) *A linguistic perspective on communicative language teaching*.
Language Learning Journal, 41 (1). 115 - 128. ISSN 0957-1736

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2011.625097>

Title: A Linguistic Perspective on Communicative Language Teaching

Journal name: Language Learning Journal

Author: Melinda Whong

Postal Address:

Linguistics and Phonetics
School of Modern Languages and Cultures
University of Leeds
Leeds, United Kingdom
LS17 5JE

Email Address: m.whong@leeds.ac.uk

A Linguistic Perspective on Communicative Language Teaching

Abstract

Despite a range of criticism Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been broadly accepted as the appropriate approach to language teaching. This paper argues that large shifts in language pedagogy firstly from 'structure' to 'meaning' and more recently from progressivism to critical pedagogy need to be tempered by a restatement of the importance of linguistics to language teaching. Ten characteristics of CLT are presented and then explored from a linguistic point of view. Throughout, explicit connections are made between cutting edge linguistic research and questions of language pedagogy within the CLT paradigm. The conclusion is a call for a renewed focus on the understanding of language for language teaching expertise.

Key Words: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), linguistics, psycholinguistics, language pedagogy, Focus on Form, second language acquisition

Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the approach to language teaching which has for decades been generally endorsed among a wide range of language teaching professionals, from academics to teacher trainers and to teachers themselves. One reason for this is that CLT as a concept is so broad that it is able to encompass a wide range of teaching practice. For many, it serves as a useful umbrella term to include a number of teaching methods in the so-called Post-methods era (Prabhu 1990, Richards and Rodgers 2001, Kumaravadivelu, 2002). Yet CLT is not without problems and criticism. As long ago as 1993, Whitley both praised CLT as 'a revolution [that] has achieved a solid base of widely accepted principles setting it apart from previous paradigms' (Whitley 1993, p. 137), while at the same time pointing out that actual implementation is fraught with challenges. And there are numerous accounts, from Nunan (1987) to Thornbury (1996) and more recently to Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005), showing that many teachers who claim to teach communicatively, in reality deliver lessons that are far less than communicative.

There have also been challenges to CLT which question the appropriateness of the approach outside the western context in which it has developed (e.g. Prabhu 1987, Chick 1996, Yu 2001). For some, CLT can be seen as an instrument of linguistic imperialism along the lines of Phillipson (1992). Chowdhury and Le Ha (2008) explore this much discussed ethical question addressing what they call the Western TESOL Industry. The appropriacy of CLT has also been questioned in less political terms as some have asked whether the communicative style is pedagogically sound. As one recent example, Ayliff (2010) argues that the meaning-based approach is not training students to achieve what is expected of them in the South African state school system. As with a number of voices, Ayliff argues in support of grammar teaching in the language classroom. The form/function debate, which

Mascumeci (1997) shows has a history that pre-dates modern conceptions of language teaching, remains healthy in the post-methods CLT era. The development of CLT can be seen as a reaction against rigid structural approaches like that of Audiolingualism which revolved almost exclusively around form. The degree to which CLT today includes some form of grammar teaching in practice varies from one method to another. The form/function debate within academic discourse is healthy, often characterised by the three-way Focus on FormS, Focus on Meaning and Focus on Form. The unconventional spelling, devised by Long (1991) emphasises the isolated nature of the teaching of forms, and distinguishes it from a focus on form which is more contextualised.. Within this debate, CLT is very much aligned with Focus on Meaning, with teacher training programmes tending to give emphasis to meaning, wholly reasonable given the aforementioned research showing teachers claiming to adhere to CLT in fact use 'traditional' approaches.

In recent years, the shift away from form in language teaching discourse has given way to another change as well. There has been a shift in the theoretical paradigm underpinning language pedagogy as an academic field. Kumaravadivelu (2006) charts the shift to so-called critical pedagogy as the mainstream approach within academic discourse. There can be no doubt, to use Kumaravadivelu's words, that 'language learning and teaching is more than learning and teaching language. It is about creating the cultural forms and interested knowledge that give meaning to the lived experiences of teachers and learners' (p. 70). As part of the critical approach to language pedagogy there has been much self-reflection and self criticism in academic circles. Even the concept of 'method' has come under scrutiny. To cite Kumaravadivelu again, there has been 'a desire to transcend the constraining concept of method' (p. 67).

These are not unimportant changes. However, there is an extent to which change too far in one direction can lead to the proverbial throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Moreover, the shift first away from form and then to critical pedagogy has the potential of moving too far from the fundamental basis of language teaching – the basic properties of language itself. Lightbown (2000, p. 435) pointed out that 'CLT reflected a move away from linguistics as the main or only basis for deciding what the units of language teaching would be.' This paper argues that linguistics is not only important to language teaching, but is and should be an integral part of it. With the field of language pedagogy experiencing a two-part move from structure to meaning, and then to a more politicised approach to language teaching, we would do well to remember the importance of language, as more narrowly defined, for language pedagogy.

One danger in moving too far away from language is a potential disconnect between the way we understand the teaching of language and the study of language. Respecting the breadth of CLT, this paper considers communicative language teaching from a linguistic point of view to argue for the importance of linguistics in language teaching. Of course, this immediately raises the contentious question of what is meant by 'linguistics'. While making brief reference to a range of approaches to linguistics, I will mostly make reference to the three mainstream views of language. The functionalist view refers to the view that traces its roots to Hallidayan principles in which language is seen as a tool for making meaning, and is

associated with a view of language development as a result of interaction and use (Halliday 2004, Butler 2003). Because of the interactionist nature of this approach, the functionalist basis to CLT is evident. What is given more explicit discussion, therefore, are the other two, more psycholinguistic views of language. At one extreme is the generative Chomskyan view which sees language as 'natural' and language acquisition as occurring in response to 'real' or natural input. The cognitive view is sometimes seen as a branch of the functional view, but has in fact developed a psycholinguistic element which sets it apart as a field in its own right. This view sees language as associative knowledge, intricately tied up with other knowledge with processing crucial not only to its functioning, but to its development as well (Croft and Cruise 2004, Evans and Green 2006). The aim of this paper is not to argue that any one of these views is somehow better. Indeed, any one of the views on its own can be seen as somewhat limited (Whong 2011). Thus, we take them as complementary, providing a 'linguistic' view.

CLT from a linguistic point of view

As an approach to teaching and not a method, CLT adheres to a set of principles, which in turn are compatible with particular teaching methods. It embodies a range of beliefs and understandings about language, learning and teaching in general. Note that there is nothing inherent to CLT which restricts it to any particular language. The few language-particular examples given in this paper refer to English, as is natural since English is the medium of expression here. Both in terms of CLT, and, more to the point, from a linguistic point of view, the claims are valid for the teaching of any language. The remainder of this paper outlines ten characteristics which are taken to be basic to CLT, but examined from a linguistic point of view. They are: integrated skills, process, meaning, authenticity, fluency, interaction, active, learner autonomy, selective error correction, and humanistic (Whong 2011, pp. 129 - 134). The aim is to highlight the centrality of language in CLT and to show that an understanding of linguistics is needed for language teaching expertise.

Integrated skills

Unlike traditional approaches which often distinguish teaching materials and classes in terms of the four skills, CLT is characterised by an integrated skills approach. In other words, a CLT lesson is likely to make use of all four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is a natural outcome of a functional 'language in use' approach since speaking without listening or writing with no intended readers would usually be odd. We can go beyond this, however, to counter a strictly skills-based approach from psycholinguistic approaches as well. Much of the work of post-war linguists has been to develop a property theory of language (Cummins 1983, Gregg 1993). Research among cognitive and generative linguists has done much to define specific properties of language, resulting in an intricately detailed understanding of the different facets that make up what we call language.

For cognitive linguists, while there may be some basis to separating language skills from language knowledge, it makes little sense to decompose language into four separate skills.

Moreover, there is a degree to which all types of knowledge, for the cognitivist, are epistemologically equivalent. This contrasts with the generative view which holds language knowledge as distinct from other kinds of knowledge. This distinction, however, is orthogonal to the four skills, defined instead in terms of language internal domains. The system of constraints within morphosyntax and phonology identified by generativists complements the lexical patterns and associations posited by cognitivists. These are not just theoretical differences, but as we will see in the next section, show qualitative differences in terms of mental processing. Of more direct relevance, these differences do not align in any meaningful way with the four skills. Instead, a property theory approach says that language is a complex system of interrelated linguistic domains. As all the domains are implicated in language, there is as little reason to isolate these domains within a pedagogical context as there is to single out any one of the four skills.

There are other distinctions within linguistics which lead to useful implications. The generative emphasis on language competence (Chomsky 1965), for example, is comfortable with a descriptive, not prescriptive grammar. While this may not resonate well with traditional notions of schooling, the CLT ethos benefits from an approach which sees informal communication as regulated by descriptively-grounded constraints while the more formal manipulation of language warrants a more prescriptive approach. Another useful distinction is implicit, subconscious vs explicit, metalinguistic knowledge, which all branches of psycholinguistics recognise – albeit with disagreement over exact properties. Again, while the implicit vs explicit distinction has many implications for teaching, it does not map onto a four-skill distinction in the way that an integrated approach does. For instance, implicit knowledge is more relevant in spontaneous language events while explicit, metalinguistic awareness is more useful for fostering increased sophistication of more deliberate language output.

In short, distinctions between descriptive and prescriptive grammars, implicit and explicit knowledge, and domains within language are all linguistically-grounded ways to view language, none of which countenance a four skills approach, but suggest instead different ways in which an integrated approach can be exploited in order to foster language development.

Process

Psycholinguists have augmented the property theoretic view of language, attempting to understand the relationship between the complex properties of language and how we process them mentally. This research aligns with a second feature of CLT, the emphasis on process over product. In CLT, value is given to the act of producing or comprehending language instead of the traditional preoccupation with form, whether in terms of learner output or in terms of exemplary models. In a similar vein, psycholinguists would not accept a view of language as merely a set of constraints, patterns or rules. Linguistic competence cannot be dissociated with the processing of language, whether during comprehension or production.

Moreover, research is emerging which shows interesting differences that trace to domain of language. A review by Slabakova (2008) of research using neuro- and electrophysiological techniques such as fMRI and ERP shows that different types of linguistic knowledge lead to activation in different areas of the brain. Specifically, structural aspects of language such as morphosyntax and phonology are processed differently to the more meaning-based domains of semantics and the lexicon (e.g. Friederici et al 2003, Kuperberg et al 2003).

While this kind of mental processing is not what CLT proponents of process over product usually have in mind, psycholinguistic research legitimizes the emphasis on process over product. Emerging from this research are proposals that language knowledge and ability develops as a result of processing. The Modular On-line Growth and Use of Language (MOGUL) of Truscott and Sharwood Smith (2004a, b), the Autonomous Induction theory of Carroll (2001), Pienemann's Processibility Theory (1998) and VanPatten's Input Processing (1996, 2002) all argue that language 'grows' not when learners memorise rules about language, but as a by-product of processing and producing language. There is a sense, in other words, in which the act of processing 'exercises' language, resulting in strengthening of that language. This clearly supports a process over product approach to language teaching.

Some of these models also highlight the distinction between subconscious linguistic knowledge and explicit metalinguistic knowledge. This is important in a process approach as it highlights the ability for (adult) learners to be metalinguistically aware in such a way as to develop strategies for overcoming areas of language of particular difficulty. In other words, learners will benefit from a sophisticated understanding of and control over the processes involved in language. To use a term coined by Swain (2006), learners develop competent skills in languaging as the hard work of making meaning in real life interaction. Arguably, the CLT emphasis on the process of making language can help learners develop ways to improve their production. To illustrate, consider the research by White (2003) and Lardiere (1998a,b, 2007) on advanced speakers of English that illustrates the common problem that learners have with mastering inflectional morphology. This research shows that even though they may omit functional morphology such as 3rd person singular -s, or the various forms of the copula verb *to be*, speakers know the grammatical principles underlying inflectional morphology. The claim is that learners know the grammar, but have difficulty mapping the linguistic notion onto the correct form. A process view of language teaching would train learners to be aware of specific types of omission such as these so that self-correction can be done by deliberate attention – in contexts when this kind of accuracy is important.

Meaning

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of CLT is the importance it places on meaning instead of the more traditional focus on grammar rules, also known as function over form (Long 1991). Language lessons should revolve around meaningful activities which require the use of language in communication, just as any community of speakers relies on language in order to function. This most basic characteristic of CLT embodies the functionalist interest in

language as expressions that people use to negotiate their daily lives. Psycholinguistic research on language structure also puts meaning as crucial to structure, albeit with philosophical disagreement over which is more fundamental. As it is an error of simplicity to promote meaning/function as an alternative to structure/form, it is worth noting that discussions of CLT have always retained some place for 'grammar'. Savignon (1991, p. 268), in her state-of-the-art paper twenty years ago insisted on a place for grammar teaching within CLT, reminding us that in their seminal paper ten years before that, Canale and Swain (1980) placed language structures as one (in fact the first) core competence within communicative competence. There are some good examples of well integrated form-function discussions in more current English language teaching literature. Hedge, for example, illustrates a meaning-based approach to structures in her chapter on 'Grammar' (2001, p. 155), presenting pronoun use and participial clauses in terms of the discourse needs of specific contexts, thereby illustrating the intricate relationship between core grammatical points and language use.

Psycholinguistic research has debated whether comprehension is primarily meaning- or structure-based; yet, like many dichotomies, it has become clear that both are equally important (Townsend and Bever 2001). And as noted by Slabakova research now shows that for both first and adult second language speakers there are comparable activation patterns for processing meaning, with a discrepancy appearing between adult learners and native speakers with regard to structural linguistic properties (Slabakova 2008: 60-3). This can be taken as endorsement for a meaning-based approach to language teaching as there is clearly much potential for meaning-based linguistic development – but not at the complete expense of structure, a point which we will return to in subsequent sections.

Research showing potential within the realm of meaning receives even more support from cognitivist research showing that lexical learning is reliant on associative networks of meaning (Boers and Lindstromberg 2008). With this in mind, it is only reasonable to argue, along with Laufer (2005), that vocabulary should be explicitly taught. As words are a subset within language, however, a Lexical Approach (Lewis 1993) should be incorporated within a broader communicative approach. While cognitivists are uncontroversially wedded to a meaning-based approach, the generative interest in structure may suggest opposition. Yet even the Universal Grammar paradigm supports a meaning-based approach. Generative research shows that learners can and will develop some aspects of a language without having been explicitly taught it. There are a series of studies showing that learners know very subtle semantic properties, some even more subtle than what their teachers are explicitly aware of (e.g. Dekydtspotter, 2001, Marsden 2009). Importantly, this research is confined to semantic properties of language. Taken together with lexical research, there is resounding psycholinguistic support for the meaning-based approach to language inherent to CLT.

Authentic

Another feature of CLT is the use of authentic materials – spoken and written texts taken from non-pedagogic sources, such as newspapers, magazines, and publicly available video or

audio broadcasts. As pointed out by Badger and MacDonald (2010), because authentic materials will not have been produced for the language classroom it is important to teach not just the texts as products, but with an eye to process as well, as authentic materials are embedded in the communicative event for which they were designed. This, in turn can help to create more authentic language tasks such as ‘gap’ tasks which require language learning users to gather information, ideally from non-pedagogically derived sources.

The use of authentic materials underscores a sound commitment to providing learners with as much input in the form of target language exposure as possible. This view is well supported by the aforementioned research showing that learners can come to know aspects of the target language which they have not been explicitly taught, as well as the well accepted generalisation that much of second language acquisition happens incidentally (VanPatten and Williams 2007). A functional view sees real language as more meaningful and thus more likely to lead to genuine engagement, a point which the cognitive linguists make much of, as engagement leads to more processing and concurrent development of knowledge. Additionally, one branch of linguistics has much to offer in this respect as it employs techniques with much potential for teaching (Braun, Kohn and Mukherjee 2006). The corpus linguistics method of searching databases of existing language for instances of words, collocations or more complex linguistic patterns offers a valuable tool for training learners to explore how the target language is actually used. Learner-friendly concordancing can help learners to go beyond a dictionary understanding of word meaning to the real world of word use. This kind of language learning would benefit from a degree of linguistic training, however, for learners to get the most out of analysing concordancing results. With a little training, learners can be taught to analyse words or phrases not just in terms of the meaning in context, but in terms of grammatical patterns, lexical co-occurrence and other types of patterns of use.

Fluency

Though we have mostly addressed comprehension so far, CLT in fact places much stock in production. While the emphasis on spoken fluency comes partly in reaction to rigid structural approaches such as Audiolingualism, this does not mean that fluency is valued at the complete expense of accuracy. Instead, speed and ease of expression are given priority in relation to the more traditional focus on accuracy in terms of grammar and pronunciation. This is especially true when speaking, as learners are urged not to worry too much about ‘correct’ forms, focussing on successful communication instead. Errors are not entirely ignored, but they are often seen as secondary to the more important aim of maximising language production. This makes complete sense not only to functionalists interested in communicative events, but to those cognitive and generative linguists who see language developing through use.

While for the generativist, increased fluency means more production which, in turn, leads to increased input for the listener, the cognitive linguist will note the importance of frequency in

input. Yet despite these clear reasons to support fluency, it is important to note research that shows production needing to be tempered by some explicit teaching for some aspects of language to be mastered. For illustration, recent work on the progressive *-ing* in English shows that this very frequent linguistic form is not readily acquired, at least not in all of its complexity (Rohde 2009). Similarly, Moyer (2009) shows that it is not sheer quantity of input, but what the learners actually do with the input they are receiving that matters for areas of phonological development. This does not mean, however, that CLT is wrong to emphasise fluency. As pointed out by Savignon (1991, p. 269), it is a mistake for fluency to be associated with function while accuracy with form, because it is absurd to suggest that there can be a dissociation of form from meaning; both are clearly implicated in any message.

What a linguistic approach can help to do is to clarify which aspects of language would benefit from an emphasis on fluency, and which need a more targeted approach for accuracy. As we have already seen, different domains of language are different – and they develop differently as well. Slabakova (2008) argues persuasively that inflectional morphology is a ‘bottleneck’ for development in a way that meaning-based aspects of language are not. Thus, for areas of language use such as information exchange required during travel or when asking for assistance, fluency is clearly important. At this level of communication, there is a real need for speakers to develop strategies such as rephrasing, lexical emphasis and an appeal to context in order to foster the exchange of information, regardless of questions of ‘right form’. For language development at advanced levels, within assessment constraints or for professional use, there is a need to emphasise accuracy in addition to fluency, with particular attention paid to functional morphology.

Interaction

The discussion so far leaves us with a potential contradiction: input and comprehension or output and production? Of course, the need is for both, and captured in the basic CLT principle of interaction. Indeed most CLT classrooms can be quickly identified by students doing tasks in groups or in pairs. The influential Interaction Hypothesis of Michael Long (1981, 1983, 1996) argues that language development depends on learner interaction including input, output and negotiation of meaning. This claim finds support in numerous empirical studies, with Keck et al. (2006) providing a useful meta-analysis.

The importance of interaction came about in part as a reaction to the over-emphasis on input by those influenced by generative linguistics. The Input Hypothesis (Krashen 1985) emphasis on input can lead to a rather skewed result of learners as the passive receivers of language ‘knowledge’ instead of active participants in their own development. Swain’s work in immersion programmes showed limited linguistic development when there is an imbalance towards input, leading to her formulation of the Output Hypotheses (Swain 1985, 2005). With equal importance on input and output, the heart of the Interaction Hypothesis is the idea that breakdown in communication will lead to an enhancement of input as the listener will naturally provide some form of feedback in order to signal miscommunication. This feedback

is what then pushes the speaker to modify or make sense of their language output, a process which leads to language development. In other words, it is not only the challenge of making sense of language, but also making sense in a language that facilitates language development. In short, much like the arguments for fluency, an emphasis on interaction aligns with the view of language development which depends on language use. Whether this is through form-function mapping as endorsed by cognitive views or the manipulation of meaningful and authentic language for natural acquisition, the cognitive and generative views lend support for interaction-based classrooms.

Active

Communicative tasks also require active learning, not passive reception of knowledge. Gap tasks, role plays and debates are activities that require heavy use of language. As noted repeatedly, higher levels of engagement with language lead to more active processing, which is what is needed for language development. We illustrate with the Input Processing model of VanPatten (1996, 2002). This model is compatible with the functionalist view that learners are driven by the need to make sense of the language input they are exposed to, but highlights the cognitive constraints on learners in terms of processing load and demands on short term memory. The Input Processing model posits linguistically defined processing strategies. One basic principle, echoing the aforementioned importance of meaning, is that learners are biased to contentful lexical items over more functional or grammatical ones. This is not a conscious decision, but instead a product of processing limitations at early stages of development. As lexical items become part of the learner's long term memory, the processing load decreases for these words, allowing the learner to begin to process grammatical information. Another principle subsequently dictates that grammatical markers that make some contribution to meaning will be processed before those that do not. The progressive *-ing*, for example, which contributes aspectual meaning, is more likely to be acquired than the third person singular *-s*, which is semantically redundant at best.

So why are active learners needed in this and other processing models? For VanPatten, Processing Instruction can push the learner to overcome processing limitations. For illustration, consider VanPatten's first noun principle, whereby learners have a bias to process the first noun as the subject of the sentence. One way to move learners away from this bias would be to ask learners to engage with examples that contradict it. Consider the following task, in which small groups are given Sentences a. and b., along with either Card 1 or Card 2.

Sentence a: Sam told the police that Sue attacked him.

Sentence b: Sue told the police that she was protecting Bill.

Card 1: What happened? Card 2: Bill is hurt. What happened?

When comparing the different stories devised by the two groups, it will be clear that the first noun is not always the subject. An even fuller range of first noun roles will emerge if learners are then asked to explain again, using sentences that start with 'Bill'.

In this type of task, learners are actively developing their language ability as they have to work out the differences in interpretation derived from the same simple set of sentences. From a psycholinguistic view, this kind of manipulation of language can lead to language development because of the active involvement by learners in the task.

Learner autonomy

While there is a large literature with different views on learner autonomy (e.g. Dam 1995, Benson 2001, Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2003), the general idea is that language learners should take ownership of their language development instead of relying heavily on the teacher and/or classroom materials. An autonomous learner who takes responsibility for their own learning will find opportunities to engage with language and take steps to improve the particular areas of difficulty. After all, the time constraints on most classroom settings mean that learners need to devote time to the language outside class as well. Learner autonomy has strong support from any generativist, as the need to increase amounts of input is fundamental. It is no coincidence that since proposing the Input Hypothesis, Krashen has devoted much of his career to researching the benefits of reading (Krashen 2004). An autonomous learner will engage in self-directed reading and other types of activities that maximise exposure to the target language.

Yet along with comprehension comes the need for production. Learner autonomy also allows for the, perhaps, old-fashioned idea of practice. After a post-behaviourist period of neglect, some cognitive linguists are doing research which is beginning to clarify the benefits of practice (see DeKeyser 2007). As discussed by DeKeyser (2007), while practice refers to attempts to improve upon an existing ability, some also argue that practice can highlight for a learner areas which need development, thereby pushing the learner to new knowledge. Regardless of this debate, increased practice which comes from self initiative beyond the classroom is a reason to foster learner autonomy in language teaching. By promoting learner autonomy, a CLT practitioner is promoting the hard work of securing competence for reliable and fluid performance.

Selective error correction

It is easy to understand why the emphasis on meaning and communication in CLT leads to an uneasy feeling about error correction. This is especially true in terms of spoken language production, but can also apply for written forms. Because excessive correction is likely to discourage a learner, it is not a priority to correct every non-targetlike feature of learner production. Moreover, a proponent of CLT does not want to continuously distract the student from the communicative message in an interaction, whether between learners or between the teacher and the student. But above all, it is important that correction does not discourage and thereby de-motivate the student as this is likely to lead to a lack of engagement, which, in turn, will certainly result in less exposure and interaction by the learner.

A Focus on Form approach to error correction is to correct only when errors lead to a breakdown in communication. There has been much research within the Interaction paradigm on different types of feedback techniques such as repetition, clarification and expansion (Russell and Spada 2006). A psycholinguistic approach says that decisions to correct or not should also depend on the aspect of language and the particular stage of development. As mentioned, errors to do with accuracy in inflectional morphology are common even at advanced language levels. Arguably, the CLT professional ought to correct these kinds of errors only if helping the learner to devise an explicit strategy to overcome them. If not, then there may be no good reason to single these out. Similarly errors of syntax are likely to signal a stage in development and be dependent on a range of factors impervious to correction, a point clearly made by Truscott (1998). By contrast, a linguistic view of errors would support correction of lexical or other meaning-based errors as these can be modified and improved upon through conscious effort at all levels of development. A psycholinguistic view of error correction would point to processing limitations as well. As the ability to process language is connected with stages of development (Pienemann 1998, VanPatten 1996, 2002), there would be no good reason to correct errors that are much beyond the current level of proficiency. In short, while hesitation to correct errors is compatible with other principles of CLT, it is also supported by a view which sees language development as occurring in stages.

Humanistic

The humanistic emphasis on fostering personal development supports cooperation over competition in the classroom and moves away from pre-determined goals which all language learning users are expected to achieve in unison. We know that there is considerable variability in second language development (VanPatten and Williams 2007), perhaps one reason why one specific teaching method for Communicative Language Teaching does not exist. CLT is part of the larger Progressive movement, a twentieth century trend in mainstream education which emphasises the needs of students as individuals, promoting the idea that active learning through doing and discovery is more effective than the passive absorption of bodies of knowledge (Dewey 1938, 1944, Hayes 2006). While many linguists may see themselves as immune from the broad post-structuralist influence on academic discourse, the influence is apparent in linguistic discussions of dialect and 'acceptable' forms of a language, such as the debate underlying the English as a Lingua Franca agenda (Graddol 1997, 2002, Jenkins 2007, Seidlhofer 2006). Also emerging are voices questioning the kinds of mainstream approaches to linguistics explored in this paper. The dynamic systems approach, for example, sees language as a naturally evolving system in constant flux (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008).

Despite these recent developments within linguistics, it is safe to say that much of mainstream linguistics continues its work with only tangential concern for concepts such as humanism. We end with this characteristic because it is important to make clear that this paper is not arguing for any kind of rejection of non-linguistic realities of language pedagogy,

but instead argues that there is a place for a linguistic view alongside others, and one necessary for pedagogical expertise.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that linguistic research lends support to a communicative approach to language teaching. The larger aim has been to reassert the need for a clear understanding of linguistics and linguistic research by language teaching professionals. This need is not, however, a call to a return to some kind of atomised approach to language which then justifies the teaching of language structures as rules or lists of words. Instead, it is important to recognise that even the most abstract of linguistic theory is contributing by clarifying our understanding of the complexity of language. This, with psycholinguistic research employing methodologies made possible by innovations in technology, can give insight into fundamental questions in language teaching, from questions of what to teach to decisions about how to teach.

References

- Badger, R. and MacDonald, M. 2010. Making it Real: Authenticity, Process and Pedagogy. *Applied Linguistics* 31: 578-582.
- Benson, P. 2001. *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Carroll, S. 2001. *Input and Evidence: The Raw Material of Second Language Acquisition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins
- Cummins, R. 1983. *The Nature of Psychological Explanations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Dam, L. 1995. *Autonomy from Theory to Classroom Practice*. Dublin: Authentik
- Dewey, J. 1938. *Experience and Education*, New York, NY: Kappa Delta Pi.
- Dewey, J. 1944. *Democracy and Education*, New York, NY: Free Press.
- Hayes, W. 2006. *The Progressive Education Movement: Is it Still a Factor in Today's Schools?*, New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ayliff, D. 2010. "Why can't Johnny write? He sounds okay!" Attending to form in English second language teaching. *Perspectives in Education* 28: 1-8.
- Boers, F. and Lindstromberg, S. (eds) 2008. *Cognitive Linguistic Approaches to Teaching Vocabulary and Phraseology*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Braun, S., Kohn, K. and Mukherjee, J. 2006. *Corpus Technology and Language Pedagogy*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

- Butler, C. 2003. *Structure and Function: A Guide to Three Major Structural-Functional Theories. Part 1, Approaches to the Simplex Clause*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Chick, K.J. 1996. Safe-talk: Collusion in apartheid education. In H. Coleman (ed.), *Society and the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 21-39.
- Chowdhury, R. and Le Ha, P. 2008. Reflecting on Western TESOL training and communicative language teaching: Bangladeshi teachers' voices. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*. 28: 305-316.
- Croft, W. and Cruise, A. 2004. *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chomsky, N. 1965. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- DeKeyser, R., ed. 2007. *Practice in a Second Language: Perspectives from Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology*. Cambridge: CUP
- Dekydtspotter, L. 2001. The Universal Parser and interlanguage: domain specific mental organization in the comprehension of combien interrogatives in English–French interlanguage, *Second Language Research* 17: 91-143.
- Evans, V. and Green, M. 2006. *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Friederici, A., Ruschemeyer, S.A., Hahne, A., and Fiebach, C. J. 2003. The role of left inferior frontal and superior temporal cortex in sentence comprehension: Localizing syntactic and semantic processes. *Cerebral Cortex* 13: 170-7.
- Gatbonton, E. and Segalowitz, N. 2005. Rethinking Communicative Language Teaching: A Focus on Access to Fluency. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*. 61: 325-353.
- Graddol, D. 1997. *The Future of English?* London: British Council.
- Graddol, D. 2006. *English Next. Why Global English May Mean the End of 'English as a Foreign Language'*, London: British Council.
- Gregg, K. 1993. Taking explanation seriously; or, let a couple of flowers bloom. *Applied Linguistics* 14: 276-294.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 2004. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* 3rd edn, London: Edward Arnold.
- Hedge, T. 2001. *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, J. 2007. *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Keck, C., G. Iberri-Shea, N. Tracy-Ventura and S. Wa-Mbaleka 2006. Investigating the empirical link between task-based interaction and acquisition: A meta-analysis, in J. Norris and L. Ortega (eds), *Synthesising Research on Language Learning and Teaching*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 91-132.
- Krashen, S. 1985. *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. New York: Longman.
- Krashen, S. D. 2004. *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. 2002. *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. 2006. TESOL methods: Changing tracks, challenging trends. *TESOL Quarterly* 10: 59-81.
- Kuperberg, G., Sitnikova, T., Caplan, D. and Holcomb, P. 2003. Electrophysiological distinctions in processing conceptual relationships within simple sentences. *Cognitive and Brain Research* 17: 117-129.
- Lardiere, D. 1998a. Case and tense in the “fossilized” steady state. *Second Language Research* 14, 1-26.
- Lardiere, D. .1998b. Dissociating syntax from morphology in divergent end-state grammar. *Second Language Research* 14, 359 - 375.
- Lardiere, D. 2008. Feature assembly in second language acquisition. In J. Liceras, H. Zobl & H. Goodluck (eds) *The Role of Formal Features in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 107 – 140
- Larsen-Freeman, D. and Cameron, L. 2008. *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Laufer, B. 2005. Focus on form in second language vocabulary acquisition. In S. Foster-Cohen (ed.) *EUROSLA Yearbook 5*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 223-250.
- Lewis, M. 1993. *The Lexical Approach*. London: Language Teaching.
- Lightbown, P. 2000. Anniversary Article: Classroom SLA Research and Second Language Teaching. *Applied Linguistics* 21: 431–62.
- Little, D., J. Ridley and E. Ushioda (eds) 2003. *Learner Autonomy in the Foreign Language Classroom: Teacher, Learner, Curriculum and Assessment*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Long, M. 1981. Input, interaction, and second-language acquisition. In H. Winitz (ed.), *Native Language and Foreign Language Acquisition, Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, Vol. 379, pp. 259–78.

- Long, M. 1983. Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation and the negotiation of comprehensible input. *Applied Linguistics* 4: 126-41.
- Long, M. 1991. Focus on form: a design feature in language teaching methodology. In K. de Bot, R. B. Ginsberg and C. Kramsch (eds), *Foreign Language Research in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Long, M. 1996. The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie and T. Bhatia (eds), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, San Diego, CA: Academic Press, pp. 413–68.
- Marsden, H. 2009. Distributive quantifier scope in English–Japanese and Korean–Japanese interlanguage. *Language Acquisition* 16: 135–77.
- Musumeci, D. 1997. *Breaking Tradition: An Exploration of the Historical Relationship between Theory and Practice in Second Language Teaching*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Moyer, A. 2009. Input as a critical means to an end: Quantity and quality of experience in L2 phonological attainment. In T. Piske and M. Young-Scholten (eds) *Input Matters in SLA*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. pp. 159-174.
- Norris, J and L. Ortega (eds) 2006. *Synthesising Research on Language Learning and Teaching*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Nunan, D. 1987. Communicative language teaching: Making it work. *ELT Journal* 41: 136-145.
- Pienemann, M. 1998. *Language Processing and Second Language Development: Processability Theory*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Phillipson, R. 1992. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Prabhu, N. S. 1987. *Second Language Pedagogy* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Prabhu, N. S. 1990. There is no best method- why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 161-176.
- Richards, J. and T. Rodgers 2001. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rohde, A. 2009. Input frequency and the acquisition of progressive. In T. Piske and M. Young-Scholten (eds) *Input Matters in SLA*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. pp. 29-46.
- Russell, J. and N. Spada 2006. The effectiveness of corrective feedback for the acquisition of L2 grammar: A meta-analysis of the research. In J. Norris and L. Ortega (eds), *Synthesising Research on Language Learning and Teaching*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 133–64.
- Savignon, S. 1991. Communicative language teaching: State of the art. *TESOL Quarterly*. 25: 261-277.

- Seidlhofer, B. 2006. English as a lingua franca in the Expanding Circle: What it isn't. In R. Rubdy and M Saraceni (eds) *English in the World*. London: Continuum.
- Slabakova, R. 2008. *Meaning in the Second Language*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Swain, M. 1985. Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass and C. Madden (eds), *Input and Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, pp. 235–52.
- Swain, M. 2005 The output hypothesis: Theory and research'. In E. Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook on Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 471–84.
- Swain, M. 2006. Languaging, agency and collaboration in advanced second language proficiency. In H. Byrnes (ed.) *Advanced Language Learning: the Contribution of Halliday and Vygotsky*. London: Continuum, pp. 95–108.
- Thornbury, S. 1996. Teachers research teacher talk. *English Language Teaching Journal* 50: 279-288.
- Truscott, J. 1998. Noticing in second language acquisition: a critical review. *Second Language Research* 14: 103–35.
- Truscott, J. and Sharwood Smith, M. 2004a. Acquisition by processing: A modular perspective on language development *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 7: 1-20.
- Truscott, J. and Sharwood Smith, M. 2004b. How APT is your theory: present status and future prospects. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 7: 43-7.
- Townsend, D. and Bever, T. 2001. *Sentence Comprehension: The Integration of Habits and Rules*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- VanPatten, B. 1996. *Input Processing and Grammar Instruction: Theory and Research*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- VanPatten, B. 2002. Input processing: An update. *Language Learning* 52: 755-803.
- VanPatten, B. and J. Williams 2007. *Theories in Second Language Acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- White, L. 2003. Fossilization in steady state L2 grammars: Persistent problems with inflectional morphology. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 6: 129-141.
- Whitley, S. 1993. Communicative language teaching: An incomplete revolution. *Foreign Language Annals* 26: 137-154.
- Whong, M. 2011. *Language Teaching: Linguistic Theory in Practice*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Yu, L. 2001. Communicative language teaching in China: Progress and resistance. *TESOL Quarterly* 35: 194-198.