

Integrating Accuracy and Fluency in Communicating Language Teaching

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Abstract

Communicative language teaching has been a popular method used by ESL teachers in many countries. The main focus of this approach is to make the learners use the target language in day-to-day situations where the learner practices his/her communicative skills of target language. This approach emphasizes fluency than accuracy, but the accuracy and fluency can be achieved by integrating these two by means of relevant learning activities. This paper tries to look at the feasibilities of integrating accuracy and fluency from different perspective by different scholars.

Keywords: CLT, accuracy, fluency

Introduction

The past record of second language teaching has witnessed changing perceptions of corrective feedback (Celce-Murcia, 1997). Actually, views on the role of corrective feedback can be highly diverse. The Audio-lingual Approach, for example, supports minimal or no tolerance of learner errors and suggests that every attempt should be made to prevent them. On the other hand, the Natural Approach regards error correction as unnecessary and counterproductive one. The latter view is also shared notably by the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach that has come to dominate L2 classrooms since the early 1970s. CLT stemmed from an effort to transfer from an exclusive focus on forms manifest in the previous structure-oriented approaches towards a focus on meaning and use. Its main concern is development of fluency. Over the years, in their pursuit of CLT, second language teachers generally have not only changed their way of teaching but more profoundly, altered their conceptualization of

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teaching/learning. Springing out of the movement is also a great conception that learning can only come about through learner-learner interactive output practice and that teachers' task lies in providing attractive activities which will get students involved in using the target language. Form-focused instruction is deemed unfavorable. Corrective feedback consequently is accorded low status in classroom processes.

Second Language Acquisition and CLT

Second language acquisition research over the past three decades has equipped us with the understanding that in learning an L2, learners develop, through intake, a language system called interlanguage based on their experience with input, and this system enables them to produce linguistic output. Input here refers to primary linguistic data, i.e., natural language data. In second language classes that solely feature meaning-based learner-learner interaction, the role of learner output supersedes the role of natural authentic input and pedagogical input. This heavy reliance on learner-generated output as classroom input appears to violate conditions that favor L2 acquisition and may deprive learners of the opportunity to develop their language system in the direction of the target.

The necessity to restore the imbalance is pressing and should be met by making two important additions to the teaching format referred to above. First, more natural authentic data should be introduced to the classroom to improve L2 learners' exposure to the target language. Second, provision of pedagogical input including form-focused instruction and error correction should be integrated into classroom processes to facilitate L2 learners' knowledge construction and enhance knowledge use.

Accuracy and Fluency

Recent classroom SLA research (has suggested that it is not only possible to integrate a focus on form with a focus on meaning but that "accuracy, fluency, and overall communicative skills are probably best developed through instruction that is primarily meaning-based but in which guidance is provided through timely form-focus activities and correction in context" (Lightbown & Spada, 1990:443).

A communicative revolution really took place by the early 80s, mostly radiating out from the UK. The key principle is the separation of classroom work into accuracy work and fluency work. Accuracy work is for concentrating on learning new bits of language (grammar patterns, functional exponents, vocabulary, etc). Fluency work is for getting the students to speak freely (say in discussions). Much confusion is caused when teachers are trained to see these as closely linked together, with accuracy work leading to fluency work which is highly impossible.

The basic principle of all communicative activities in the classroom, whether accuracy-based or fluency-based, is the information gap, which has remained with us ever since. The communicative revolution, via the information gap, has been very profound and real, and has coursed through every aspect of method, whether accuracy or fluency oriented. As an example of the accuracy-oriented information gap, we can have communicative drills (e.g. students interview each other about their daily routines to get controlled practice of Present Simple for routines) and as an example of a fluency-oriented information gap, we can have free discussion, where the students discuss a real thing without interruption and the teacher takes notes of the mistakes and feeds these back afterwards.

Emphasis on Communication

In the US in the late 70s, an influential version of second language learning theory was developed by Stephen Krashen, which postulated that learners acquired language if they are fed a diet of genuine communication (as does the child acquiring the first language), but they only learnt language if they are fed a diet of classroom exercises.

The result was that many teachers started to believe that unconscious acquisition was profounder, more real, and therefore better, than conscious learning. These teachers decided that the classroom had to become an immersive bath of authentic communication and this attitude persists today in many classrooms, at the expense of conscious learning (Lowe, 2003).

A Combined Processing Model

Actually, many variations of the learning-acquisition model have emerged (including those of Bialystok, Long, and Rutherford), and a combined processing model seems to be the current

favourite, which is to say that the classroom learner probably operates both mechanisms – learning and acquisition – all the time, with some interchange between the two; it is now thought, increasingly, that teachers cannot strongly influence how these mechanisms are used by their students (Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

Grammaticalized Lexis

Recently, there has been a growth of interest in classroom tasks which help the student to see grammar in its global and truly communicative context; some modern academic linguists' take the view that language is grammaticalised lexis. Using this principle for language syllabuses, some schools have dispensed with grammar, and give the title *lexis* to many language bits which once might have been called grammar.

As for language exercises, we can use global text exercises (using semi-authentic and authentic texts) in which the 'grammar' has been taken out (i.e. the inflections, the articles, the infinitive markers, etc), and which the students have then to put back. This is very motivating for the learners, it is very individualized, and it is very efficient for the teacher, who only has to spend time clarifying the language items which are causing problems. The grammaticisation approach is becoming increasingly popular, but it is important to keep it in perspective with the other approaches to teaching grammar, which all have their relevance (Lowe, 2003).

Various Practices such as Use of Translation

We use translation when it is quick and efficient to get across meaning. We still teach grammar, even though we no longer assume it to be a starting point, but more as a reference point. We use drilling (e.g., listen-repeat) when it is an efficient way for students to get their mouths round the sounds and the rhythm of a useful expression. We use practice exercises (e.g. gap-fills) to raise students' awareness of common lexical expressions. We use focus on functional expressions when students listen to a tape model of a telephone call. We use information gaps almost all the time, in accuracy as well as fluency work; we use personalization all the time, whether the students are practicing language, preparing for a role-play, or reading the newspaper. We use a task-based approach when students are set a discussion role-play and are required to prepare their

positions in groups, asking for language help from the teacher as they go along. We use output feedback when the teacher uses a conversation activity to produce student output, and then feeds back on language errors. we use test-teach-test when students are set a short telephone-call role-play without time to prepare, and this is taped and followed up with focus on telephone phrases, which is then followed by another telephone role-play .we use noticing activities practically all the time, because any activity in which the students are being invited to put their attention on an aspect of language is a noticing activity; we use grammaticisation activities when we want to see how each student's individual internal grammar is progressing (Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

It has been a curious tendency in ELT for both the proponents of new ideas and for many teachers, to want to dispense with the old to make way for the new. This cannot be right. The modern teacher is able to use any approach from the past as long as it is appropriate and useful.

Conclusion

It is possible to foster accuracy and fluency in communicative language teaching. Many of us would agree that accuracy is indispensable to improving fluency. It is not that accuracy or fluency but accuracy and fluency. In fact, they are mutually influential. Accuracy brings fluency and fluency brings further accuracy. Accuracy and fluency are not contradictory but rather like two pillars that support the spiral stairs toward communicative competence.

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