Creating Histories and Spaces of Meaningful Use

Toward a Framework of Foreign Language Teaching with an Emphasis on Culture, Epistemology and Ethical Pedagogy

Harald A. Kraus

Thesis Presented for the title of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Division of Communication and Education

October 2003

© Harald Kraus 2003
UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without the permission of the author.

Summary

This thesis arises out of a critique of the way language is decontextualized and presented from a reductively linguistic viewpoint in foreign language instruction. In particular, it focuses on the weaknesses of the broad approach known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and highlights the disparity between its theoretical assumptions and practical applications. With this in mind, the thesis identifies and explores three foundational premises that should be considered as part of an attempt to design a theoretically coherent framework for foreign language instruction. By applying three sets of principles based on these premises, the thesis goes on to outline such a framework.

After providing a background to the study, the first consideration is the nature of cultural and communicative performance. The study turns to sociological concepts regarding cultural organization and production, in order to better conceptualize how 'culture' can be understood in the context of foreign language learning. The second part of this area focuses on meaning and communication in order to undermine current treatments of 'language' in foreign language pedagogy.

The second area of interest is that of learning and thus considers a number of theories of how people learn. The focus here is on learning-in-general rather than learning languages specifically. What emerges from this are a number of principles that should be borne in mind when creating conditions favorable to language learning.

Finally, one largely overlooked area in foreign language learning and applied linguistics more broadly, is how the field of foreign language pedagogy constructs and legitimizes its practices, as well as suppresses its foundational theoretical assumptions in its activities (including research, methodology and teaching). A chapter is therefore devoted to this issue, and a set of principles is formulated in order to ensure that the design of any instructional framework is honest and ethical.

Thus furnished with the triangulation of principles, an attempt is made to outline how a learner-focused, ethical pedagogical framework that stresses culture might look.

This thesis is theoretical in nature and relies on arguments and positions from diverse and less commonly considered academic fields in foreign language instruction. Its main theoretical inspiration comes from concepts and claims generally considered 'poststructural' or 'postmodern'. However, there is no exclusive devotion to any particular author or theory.

It is hoped that this thesis can make a genuine, if not controversial, contribution to the field of foreign language teaching by initiating a dialogue concerning the (lack of) philosophical and epistemological reflexivity in the field.

Acknowledgements

Above all I would like to express my profound gratitude to Professor Andrew Lian for his constant encouragement and unfailing confidence in me since we have known each other. Moreover, I feel extremely lucky to have met a scholar who has had the courage to challenge the status quo of language teaching and for inspiring me in turn. Had it not been for his unique insights and depth of thinking, it is quite possible that I would now be an English teacher with nary an idea of the philosophical issues that underpin the learning of a foreign language.

This thesis, its guiding theoretical position and chapter 6 in particular would also not exist were it not for the work, ideas and passion of my former teacher, Ania Lian. Her critique of the legitimizing practices in which methods and theories are offered, accepted and instituted, very often with no sound basis, is timely and important for the field and needs to be continued. Hopefully my effort regarding this issue is a worthy contribution to this discourse.

I would also like to thank the staff at Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand for giving a job and a chance to a green teacher (for the 2000-2001 academic year) and therefore for allowing me to gain invaluable practical experience. I thank them also for giving me free reign to devise a course on cross-cultural communication based on my developing ideas.

Thank you to the friendly administrative staff at the University of Canberra for solving any problems or queries I have had regarding aspect of my enrolment. Kay Hyland in particular has always been helpful and prompt regarding any queries or concerns I had with my APAS scholarship.

I am grateful to Dr. Jeremy Jones for being my secondary supervisor.

I am of course hugely indebted to my wife and partner Anny Blanco for putting up with ravings that do not wholly interest her, for tolerating my anti-social tendencies, and for the words 'working, my love?' when obviously I was not.

I thank my parents in general for their support, and in particular for a home for six months in order to complete the project.

I also thank the many friends and acquaintances who have discussed this project with me, both for their ears, and for the occasional insightful point or question that I have been able to develop.

Finally, I thank the University of Canberra for the incredible and privileged opportunity to attempt this thesis and the powers that be in the Australian Government for awarding me with the APAS scholarship. Without it I would never have been able to write this thesis.

Contents

Chapter 1 The Study of Culture 1
1.1 The Lack of Culture in Foreign Language Teaching..... 4
1.2 The Need (to Recognize the Need) for Culture in FLT..... 8
1.3 Social Theory and Language Learning..... 15
1.4 The Postmodern Slant..... 24
1.5 Creating Histories and Spaces..... 30
1.6 Aims and Goals of this Thesis..... 33
1.7 The Outline of this Thesis..... 35

Chapter 2 Communicative Language Teaching: The Pedagogical (R) evolution.....39
2.1 Communicative Competence..... 40
2.2 Communicative Language Teaching..... 44
2.3 The Critique of CLT..... 54
2.4 Summary and Discussion: Toward Culture..... 62

Chapter 3 Review: Culture in Foreign Language Pedagogy..... 67
3.1 Defining and Perceiving Culture..... 68
3.2 Learning Culture: Acculturation..... 74
3.3 Teaching Culture..... 83
3.4 Problems in Determining the Goals of Teaching and Learning Culture..... 96
3.5 Critiques of CIFLL Studies and Teaching.....102
3.6 Summary and Discussion..... 106

Chapter 4 Culture and Communication, Content and Expression.....110
4.1 Classical Problems and Issues of the Social Sciences and the Concept of Culture: A History and General Orientation..... 112
4.2 Finding a Third Way: Critiquing Classical Cultural Conceptions..... 120
4.3 Culture, Language and Meaning..... 143

4.4 Summary: Making Culture Meaningful..... 174

Chapter 5 Learning and Becoming........ 182
5.1 Sociocultural and Sociocognitive Learning Theory..... 184
5.2 Constructivism.....200
5.3 Experiential Learning and Collaborative Learning.....209
5.4 Neurological Perspectives on Epistemology and Learning..... 214
5.5 Rhizomatic Learning: an Introduction? 221
5.6 Summary and Discussion: Epistemological Principles of Foreign Language and Culture Learning..... 224

Chapter 6 Institutional Practices, Ethics and the Representation of Knowledge.....233
6.1 Institutional Legitimization of Knowledge and Practices.....235
6.2 Theory and Practice.....245
6.3 Legitimacy in FL Educational Practice 256
6.4 Summary: Ethical Pedagogy.....267

Chapter 7 Critique of Classroom and Instructional Activities from the Perspectives Outlined..... 275
7.1 Critique of Methods and Activities in Communicative Language Teaching...276
7.2 Summary and Discussion..... 299

Chapter 8 Toward a Framework of Culture Learning in FLT..... 307
8.1 Creating Histories and Spaces..... 308
8.2 The Classroom Reconfigured: A General Approach to Designing a Principled Approach and Syllabus..... 316
8.3 Toward Genuine Student Autonomy, Discovery and Negotiation ... Flexible Learning? 329
8.4 Testing Cultural Competence..... 346
8.5 Technology..... 349

8.6 A 'Postmodern' Language Course..... 352

Chapter 9 Conclusion: Principles and Frameworks..... 356
9.1 Summary of Themes, Issues and Principles..... 356
9.2 Limitations and Anticipated Criticisms..... 361
9.3 Suggestions and Further Research..... 364
9.4 Concluding Remarks..... 366

References 367

List of Illustrations

Figure 1.1 Trinity of Issues for Culture in FLT..... 19

Figure 3.1 Tree Diagram of Culture Teaching: Approaches and Procedures..... 95

Figure 7.1 The Learner's Gaze in Task-based Activities.....302

Figure 8.1 The CLT Model of Competence.....354

Figure 8.2 The Cultural and Multidisciplinary Model..... 355