

**Creating Histories and Spaces of Meaningful Use**  
**Toward a Framework of Foreign Language Teaching with an Emphasis**  
**on Culture, Epistemology and Ethical Pedagogy**

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## 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.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **The Study of Culture**

The most fundamental purpose in learning another language is to learn about – and with – other human beings. Yet it very often seems that this aspect of a person's desire, hope, obligation or necessity to communicate with another has been the most neglected and forgotten in Foreign Language Classrooms, replete as it is with discursively legitimized notions such as vocabulary or sentences, pronunciation or grammar, and practices such as tasks, lessons, grading and exams. But we do not talk *to* words or sentences, or socialize with grammar. Nor do we visit the houses of grades.

When we communicate we engage ourselves, body and mind and spirit, with another body, mind and spirit, whether it is for good or for bad, better or worse. If that Other shares our ways of communicating and interacting – our 'cultural background' – we can be *reasonably* sure that much of the time our behavior and speech will suit our intentions (whether our 'true' intentions are obvious or ulterior) and will be interpreted likewise, even if this too is a matter of degree. Should that Other not share our own commonly understood and interpreted ways of interacting, and we are attempting to communicate with him or her, we realize that successful communication is an infinitely complex, indeed amazing achievement, and one that involves much more than all the words and rules we have ever tried to memorize.

Foreign language teaching (FLT) has for many years determined that its objective is to foster an ability to communicate. This has not always been the case, for there was a time when the study of another language commonly meant studying a language in order to be able to read classic works of literature in their original versions. The aim of communication however, in many ways raises the bar. It involves more than the silent and leisurely commune with text, and introduces interpersonal challenges and complications, many of which are metalinguistic as well as paralinguistic, and there can be a great difference between knowing a language within the confines of its objectification, and knowing how to communicate.

With its latter day interest in fostering communicative competence, the meta- and paralinguistic drive has filtered, albeit relatively slowly, into foreign language teaching. Indeed, there is a growing list of determinants of significance considered to be of importance, and foreign language teaching occasionally considers them in its syllabuses. However, these interests are more often seen as incidental, and ultimately it can seem that despite its emphasis on communication foreign language pedagogy has gone about quietly ignoring them. Language continues in the main to be defined and presented as an internally coherent and self-sufficient system.

For this reason culture is a real spanner in the works. The biggest problem of course is that 'culture' is such an ambiguous notion that any attempt to conceptually contain it is fraught with the danger of reductionism. Even to borrow an operational definition is difficult, since 'culture' has been tackled from so many perspectives, often blending, often at cross-purposes, so that to expect a linear development or a single history of the meaning of culture is simply misguided. Various applications and versions of the term include the familiar culture of aesthetics, referring to what are known as the 'high' arts, the culture of behavioral refinement and taste, circulating most predominantly during Victorian age of Matthew Arnold and Oscar Wilde, the 'artifacts' of a people, the biological sense of the term describing bacteria, and the farming origins, as seen in the term 'agriculture'.

In considering culture as the range of practices, behaviors and symbols said to be 'shared' by a group of people, many disciplines, especially with so-called 'postmodernist' or 'poststructuralist' interests and affiliations, appear to have placed an undue emphasis on difference between people, as though there were no common points of reference, no possible opportunities for successful communication or understanding of one another across cultures, nor of any basis for dialogue. Indeed, one of the main accusations against poststructuralists and postmodernists is that they have offered an unduly pessimistic view of the world and its inhabitants, and of deliberately impeding the hope of *any*, let alone 'cross-cultural' understanding.

However, to question or deny the possibility of 'complete' or unproblematic understanding, if that is the case, does not amount to denying a common humanity, nor to denying similarities of humans in terms of basic needs and wants, nor the possibility of communicative goodwill towards and acceptance of strangers. All of these positive aspects of human interaction are acknowledged. But to emphasize them as a pedagogical strategy would be to present a disrespectfully simplified picture of groups and individuals other than ourselves, nor would it 'help learners to overcome the problems of interactions...[when] interaction is crucial to [the] experience of a sense of common humanity' (Byram and Fleming 1998: 4). Moreover, no matter how well disposed our cultural Other may be, their patience with a communicatively or culturally ignorant interlocutor is not bottomless.

It is also recognized that difference does not only apply *across* national or official cultures. Indeed, many of the discourses in which difference features heavily are more concerned with divisions *within* cultures and national boundaries. Here main dichotomies and categories of 'otherization' are likewise, if not primarily, established: along with native/migrant, are man/woman, white/colored, heterosexual/homosexual and so on, where categories to the right of each division are defined and evaluated by the centric, judgmental eye on the left, which at once claims its own power while diminishing that of the other. As much as this process needs to be challenged, it is

also important to see that the construction of difference is collaborative to the construction of culture.

It is for these reasons that overcoming difference, both in the communicative and the ideological context, by understanding not only *what* is different, but *how* it comes to be seen to be different becomes perhaps a central problematic in language learning. The theme of this thesis therefore is 'understanding the cultural Other', and might be seen as part of the 'cultural turn' to coin a phrase, in foreign language pedagogy. It is a relatively recent interest, at least in the sense that it has become an explicit problematic rather than an unconscious, neglected or secondary aim. As such it is in its theoretical and practical infancy, and to suggest that there are widespread, clearly formulated, rigidly grounded practices for the study of culture in a foreign language education context would be misleading. To further suggest that 'culture' is ontologically resolved – in any field – would be outright deception. Moreover, the notion of 'understanding' demands further questions as to what this means, how it is to be attained, and who aids in its development.

The task that remains then is to launch oneself against the monstrous abstraction that is called culture, to question what it is all about, what it can do for us as researchers and pedagogues, and more importantly what it can do for the language learner.

### **1.1 The Lack of Culture in Foreign Language Teaching**

A review of literature concerned with cross-cultural education reveals a conflicting message. While in 1992 Prodromou writes of a 'burgeoning bibliography on cross-cultural matters' (Prodromou 1992: 39), Atkinson (1999) argues that little attention has been paid. It is unlikely however, that anyone would dispute the claim that there is no 'culture teaching' as there is a school of thought and practice that has collected under the name of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), no matter how it is defined and (mis)interpreted. Byram writes that 'in no sense can [the study of culture] be said to have been afforded universally the serious consideration it deserves'



(Byram 1989: 58). There is a distinct lack of both research and practice in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and FLT which goes toward a 'workable model to understand the nature of culture and its relation to language' (Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco 1999: 16) and the new-found interest in the concerted institution-wide study of culture in the foreign language pedagogy is still very much in its infancy, 'burgeoning bibliography' or not. Indeed, in some cases such undertaking has been positively discouraged on the grounds that language should not be bound to cultural settings in which students are unlikely to find themselves:

The work of The Council of Europe in the early 1970s ... and the subsequent development of communicative language teaching were informed by a view of English as an international language. English was seen as a means of communication which should not be bound to culturally specific conditions of use, but should be easily transferable to any cultural setting. Authenticity was a key quality, but only insofar as it provided reliable models of language in use (Pulverness 1995: 7).

The final two sentences reveal the somewhat paradoxical and in many ways misleading conceptualization of communication. On the one hand it is happy to separate 'culturally specific conditions' from 'language in use'. On the other hand, the promotion of 'reliable models' raises more profound questions and issues involving representation and objectivity. The reliance on 'models' skirts questions as to what purpose they are to have, how they have been delimited and defined, by who, on what basis, and of what they are actually meant to be representations. Who in fact, are they reliable for? What philosophical, social and pedagogical questions, moreover, does 'language in use' raise?

Many argue that culture has in some ways always been part of foreign language education, and not only, as current culture theorists assert with unintended irony, because language *is* culture (for example, Byram 1989). The problem that contemporary theorists see is in the previous conceptualization of culture: they do not so much criticize the total absence of culture as its relative unimportance, which they argue is based on inadequate understanding of how culture and language 'inform' each other. Kramsch, for instance, claims that culture was the fun side of the real

business of learning language, viewed as a 'relief' rather than a fundamental aspect of the educative process (Kramsch 1993). Culture, in these terms was – and no doubt in most cases still is – either a collection of facts and cultural information or a study of 'high' culture, sourced mainly from literature.

Indeed, a striking pattern is that most researchers who take culture more seriously begin by pointing out that not only has culture been underplayed, but that it has been in some regards misrepresented and misconstrued. Many draw attention to the traditional understanding of Culture ('with capital C') as the study of a nation's artistic, literary productions. Others speak of the (various) three F's: Facts, Faces and Fiestas (Cruz, Bonissone and Baff 1995: 1), or 'food, fairs and folklore' (Kramsch 1993: 24).

The 'closest' language teaching has come to show an interest in cultural matters is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which began as a reaction to structural-based instruction, but which has since grown to encompass practically all activities under the rubric of language learning. That is, it is no longer a position but a universally endorsed academic way of life, almost as difficult to define, and thus rigidly apply, as 'language' or 'culture'.

Asserting here that there is a viable and causal progression from the theories of communication to those of culture does not represent a given in CLT methodology. In fact, one criticism is that despite its communicative emphasis, CLT has overlooked 'both the links between language and culture and the necessity to understand communication between non-native speakers...and native speakers as *intercultural communication* rather than *communication in the target language*' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1999b: 3, emphasis in original). In other words, a pedagogical emphasis on communication has not necessarily emphasized the features of the *location* of that communication. It is one thing to use an 'authentic text' based on a (weak) theoretical premise, it is another to ignore the cultural, political, social and of course material and physical context of that text, for example. Culture is not treated as the domain of

motivated signifying practices or semiotic construction, but as the 'fifth dimension' of language learning (Damen 1987) - another 'skill' to be mastered. The assertion of a link therefore, between CLT and cultural awareness-raising is made in a sense on *behalf* of CLT, although in doing so CLT is taken beyond its own tenets. It is grounded in theory that posits communication, properly understood, as comprising and constituting *social and political acts*, rather than the conduit-like transfer of instrumental meaning, and which embodies in various and possibly indeterminate ways the cultural constructs of given interactions.

Hall writes:

What has been given scant theoretical attention in SLL/A, but arguably has significant consequences for both language learning theory and pedagogy, are the larger sociohistorical and political forces residing in both the meanings of the resources and the social identities of those who aim to use them (1995: 207).

In a similar vein, Kramsch (1993: 234) notes that a 'lack of theoretical framework of culture and for contrastive cultural analyses' is one of the main obstacles preventing the integration of the cultural aspect in FL education.

As well as with the concern over method however, is the concern over content and what will constitute 'teachable material' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1999a: 116). Outside of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory however, which is arguably still concerned with language as an autonomous system, not much is asked by way of what is *learnable* or, to frame the problem more epistemologically, what is actually known, once one claims that something has been learned.

Much of the attitude of neglect towards culture and generally wider conceptions of communication and interaction can be attributed to the status of applied linguistics in foreign language teaching. As the commonly accepted mother discipline for language teaching in terms of academia and research, applied linguistics itself struggles with the tensions that arise between wanting to treat language as an autonomous system,

available for scientific scrutiny, and the realization that its actual manifestation is not as neatly packaged as the analyzed version (Corson 1997). A disciplinary upshot of this is that while language teaching is imprecated with 'topics and issues treated very seriously in psychology, political science, sociology, anthropology, and especially in education itself' (Corson 1997: 167), these topics are not treated seriously or directly in applied linguistics – and, via applied linguistics, in FLT. Indeed, it appears that the division made between language as self-contained system and as social system is a source of intra-disciplinary tension with 'uncertain' applied linguists 'trained in the one approach to their work but very aware of the logic of the other' (Corson 1997: 167). Further, because linguistics aims to manage its object by confining its structure to descriptions of laws, and therefore quietly neglect the unknowable (or perhaps unscientifically knowable), 'language teaching has tended to by-pass the problem of variability in language use by offering learners minimalist versions of the target language' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1997: 5).

There is thus a growing and widespread recognition for the need to address culture as a fundamental aspect of FLT, but despite this many rightfully argue that there is still in essence no epistemologically justified foundation or framework – much less position – with which it is addressed. Crozet et al write that:

the persistence of socio-cultural goals in language education plans, without the explication of these goals into a robust theoretical position, is a neglect that language professionals can no longer tolerate (Crozet et al. 1999: 4).

The time has come for concerted and applied effort to be directed to redressing the imbalance between the linguist's language and its social materialization.

## **1.2 The Need (to Recognize the Need) for Culture in FLT**

Learning to engage with texts and discourses...entails far more than language development or skill acquisition per se. It involves the development and articulation of common sense, of hegemonic 'truths' about social life, political values, and cultural practices (Luke 1995a: 35).

It is of course one thing to demonstrate that there is a lack of cultural content, description or analysis in FLT, but another to argue that it is actually needed. One might ask whether, beyond remembering a workable stock of vocabulary, putting it together in a syntactically acceptable formula and, if speaking, pronouncing the utterance well, what else the learner is supposed to be able to do? But a person asking this has prejudged the question; it could only come from a someone who supposes first and foremost that the linguistic structure she deals with is the starting point for the language learner, and that all else is secondary and supplementary. It is only from a viewpoint which is steeped in a linear and binary conception of the object-subject relationship, that sees a discreet and tiny building block of language that can be assembled from simple to complex that the above question is 'obvious'. It is only from the perspective that learning a language is a process of sequential acquisition of self-contained units that challenges the need for a more socially aware, truly communicative curriculum.

An 'extra-linguistic' perspective on the other hand, would hold that the learner could not remember a list of words, lock them together appropriately, nor pronounce them well without *simultaneously* being aware (consciously or otherwise) of the omnipresent social import of their production: it is the social, interactive, cultural spheres which play a more than supplementary, indeed determinative role in the manner in which one interacts, pronounces, uses words. Arguably, it is not a question of *first* learning one thing – a thing that by no means is purely derived by itself, but is an abstraction – *and then* another to build up one's routine knowledge.

There are in fact numerable, arguably inalienable reasons to integrate culture and language. Perhaps the four most obvious, interconnected reasons for studying culture are: 1) to bring to the fore the always and ever present but previously disregarded cultural 'aura' of communication, 2) to raise awareness of cultural and social norms and behaviors, 3) to be able to behave and communicate in ways that a 'native' will find appropriate and familiar, that is, to reduce ambiguity, and, 4) to successfully

carry out interactive needs in the target culture while avoiding discrimination based on stereotypes of the Other, in other words, to 'empower' oneself in the cross-cultural interaction.

Dlaska (2000) also provides a thorough case for the study of culture by listing eight legitimate and justifiable reasons as to why culture should be an integral, indeed unavoidable, component to general language courses. To summarize, culture should be taught:

1. because language and culture are inseparable
2. because the study of culture is a motivating factor whether for instrumental reasons (for example, career considerations) or out of interest
3. following this, because students are likely to interact in some capacity among foreigners
4. because it 'allows for coherence in topical content' (Dlaska 2000: 251), and makes language relevant
5. because it 'raises the profile of language teaching' (Dlaska 2000: 251) as a challenging intellectual pursuit
6. because it gives 'structure and coherence' to often disjointed, non-integrated modules in the higher education context
7. because, in Britain, it introduces the 'European dimension into the academic diet' of university students (Dlaska 2000: 252)
8. because we live in increasingly multicultural societies, and therefore need to learn to understand each other in order to achieve harmony (Dlaska 2000: 250-252)

Overcoming ethnocentrism and negative stereotypes is another commonly cited reason for raising cultural awareness (Cruz et al. 1995; Lambert 1999), although it has also been noted that substituting positive stereotypes for negative ones should not be a goal and that they 'ultimately do not allow for more flexibility in actual cultural encounters' (Dlaska 2000: 260). And Seelye's motives for the teaching of foreign culture are founded in the need to overcome ignorance: he provides interesting and

startling (if not stereotypical!) statistics of, for example, the inability of North Americans to locate other countries on a world map (Seelye 1984: 35-36).

Buttjes (1991: 6) writes that the need for 'cultural mediation' has been most recognized with regard to the immigrant experience, seen as a way of helping immigrants adjust to a new cultural environment. Related to this is what might be termed the 'minority experience'. It is where the politics of language are perhaps most evident, with dominant group perceptions having the triple-bogey effect of perceiving the minority as substandard, or inferior, of thus diminishing its worth as a culture in its own right, and ultimately of denying its members the same status in terms of opportunities for political rights, employment and education. These conditions can often be attributed to cross-cultural misunderstanding. In bicultural schools, Cruz et al. (1995: 3) argue that 'Regular programs must address the culture issue because it is one of the principle reasons for academic failure of our language minority groups'. Trying to understand other cultural realities, whether from a dominant or minority perspective as well as in the foreign language context, is thus a general educational goal.

Another purpose in understanding foreign cultures has been identified in the field of inter- or multi-national business. Students of foreign languages, as noted above, are often motivated for reasons of employment, much of which may cross cultural boundaries. As representatives not only of themselves, or their cultures, employees are also representatives of the companies for whom they work. Employees able to successfully complete exchanges in the market context not only therefore increase their individual 'marketability', but also that of their employers:

firms which are best able to identify and reconcile (cultural) differences, or even exploit them to their gain, are likely to acquire a noticeable competitive advantage in the marketplace. (Dunning 1997: 196)

While the notion of exploitation has unfortunate connotations, the recognition that cross-cultural sensitivity can result in higher profits has resulted in changes in the way many corporations conduct their international business.

### ***1.2.1 Culture from the Linguist's Perspective***

Byram notes that when language is taught as a separate, acultural entity, learners treat the target language as an 'epiphenomenon of their own language' (Byram 1991: 18), attributing it with their own cultural understandings, resulting not in foreign language learning in a proper sense, but as a 'codified version' of their own (Byram 1988; 1991). This can be seen as a negative transfer of the conceptual rather than the linguistic kind.

In studying 'language' as a traditional linguist would see it, the learner – and perhaps more appropriately, the researcher continually encounters 'phantom' dichotomies: language-culture, form-meaning, content-expression, competence-performance, input-output. These distinctions can be called phantom because ultimately they are only conceptual. To realize this one needs only to imagine a communicative setting in which the speakers employ only one side of the binary: imagine that is, someone communicating only in grammar, someone using dictionary defined words devoid of cultural connotation, someone only receiving input. Even if it were possible to imagine, that 'someone' could only be one of two things – a completely disembodied Cartesian brain, or a robot.

Cook is cynical when he challenges the dominance and definition of the use of 'authentic' text, and comments that a focus on meaning has become the unquestioned 'dogma of our time' (1997: 226). Yet arguably, culturally competent communication is knowing how to say what you mean and meaning what you say. This involves a multilayered capability in which corporeal, conceptual, cultural and political factors come into play to make meaning. Again, Cook seems to suggest, first, that there is a natural separability between communication, form and meaning. Second, if a focus on meaning has not achieved Cook's desired results (though he does not state them) it



may have more to do with the inadequate conceptualization of meaning itself, than with its use per se in the classroom.

Critics of the call to recognize the importance of culture might – rightly – question how much the analysis and subsequent knowledge of the target language's culture (presuming such knowledge is demonstrable) is really necessary in order to develop an ability to effectively communicate. But the 'how much' reveals for one, that this is a question that implies the need for a quantitative answer, one which would arguably be impossible to provide. And one can also infer that the question is attempting to straddle two epistemological areas at once: that the same knowledge is involved in knowledge of language and knowledge of communication (or ability to communicate). It therefore is reproducing the classic competence-performance dichotomy as discussed by Chomsky (1965), which mistakenly implies a hegemonic or hierarchical relationship in favor of structural linguistics, suggesting that there is an *a priori* linear linguistic development to communicative ability. Yet other positions would reject such a path-like conception of language development.

### **1.2.2    *Supplement, Complement, Base***

This leads to another possible assumption concerning bids to study culture if it is held that they make determinative claims; that studying culture will *cause* linguistic knowledge. Thus the question as to how much communicative ability can facilitate the development of linguistic (i.e. structural) competence is one which is attempting to demand a commitment by those seeking to call for more cultural awareness to make claims that the study of culture can solve *all* language learning problems and difficulties. It is a demand that should be rejected, if only on the basis that no such claim should be expected of *any* approach or perspective. Rather, the study of culture, which is built on the hope that it will lead to cultural and contextual awareness, should be seen as another and crucial process of foreign language learning to comprise a more holistic approach towards understanding and facilitating communicative ability. Culture study should therefore not be placed in the service of language study. As Buttjes writes 'culture should not be reduced to the status of

providing a suitable content for language exercises, or of filling on the background of textbooks, or of offering the focus for advanced text comprehension studies' (Buttjes 1990: 53).

Thus it must be noted that 'communication' or, as will later be suggested 'performative ability' are in this project being used as the central objectives of foreign language learning. It is felt that this goal clarifies an often ironic conclusion that writers make when they argue that 'language' and 'culture' are inseparable, as for example Byram, quoted above does. *Of course* language and culture are separable, especially in analytical terms. That is after all what has led to the criticism that culture has been a neglected consideration and subject. Moreover, 'language' is what linguists study as an extracted (perhaps more than abstracted) system in an overall 'assemblage' of 'semiotic regimes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). 'Communication' on the other hand, cannot legitimately be conceived as an event occurring without language *or* culture, as an event occurring without people, between people<sup>1</sup> and most importantly, between socialized, acculturated people. It was this realization, partly, that gave rise to CLT, even if it will soon be argued that the 'communicative' part has since been inadequately conceived and treated.

A final point to be made in favor of addressing culture is that – while the emphasis here is on the potential face-to-face cross-cultural interaction between speakers – it is equally important to recognize that culture is of course infused in all manner of communicative production. Luke for example, is one researcher who convincingly shows how texts reveal – and construct – cultural perceptions, power imbalances, 'subject positions' and normative guidelines, so that even the filling out of a bank form, or a job application for example, requires that the reader infer the cultural procedures involved (Luke 1992; 1995a; 1995b; Luke and Kapitzke 1994). Culture therefore, is in the very texts that learners hope to understand when reading ability is

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, animals communicate. There are likewise many different types of language. However, I think it is fair to argue that we are limiting ourselves to the human condition.

their primary motivation in learning a foreign language. Thus, while some have argued that it is unfair to impose the study of culture on learners who have no intention of actually interacting with members of the target language (e.g. Alptekin 1993), such a position ignores (once again) culture's dominance in regulating, or providing a guide to the production and interpretation of meaning and behavior.

In sum, one of the pivotal arguments in this thesis is that the study of culture should be a basal *as well as* complimentary and supplementary feature to the study of the foreign language. The point is not to privilege culture at the expense of other possible explanations and ways of approaching communication, but to accord it the respect and importance it deserves in the study of foreign language for the purpose of communicating. It should be *basal* because of the inseparable cultural nature of communication, and textual production. It should be *complimentary* and *supplementary* because it should not be presented as a replacement to other means of description in the study of communication. This is because one aim is to broaden the range of options for the learner, in contrast to pedagogical practices which can have the effect of presenting disciplinarily legitimized and sanctioned *components* of communication as the most important, or perhaps even *only* aspects that the learner needs to know in order later to have the ability to communicate with the cultural other.

### **1.3 Social Theory and Foreign Language Learning**

One principle aim of this thesis is to conceptualize the epistemological and methodological problems of learning another culture from a perspective that is not 'linguacentric'. This is to say that, while the study of culture is envisioned as an integral part of the formal foreign language learning course, the issues surrounding such study are not solely handled from a linguist's perspective and interests. Culture is not to be reduced to idioms, popular sayings and intermittently clarified metaphors. It is to be an interdisciplinary approach operationally based on social theory, though

many sources do not strictly fit into this description: philosophy, anthropology, ethnography and even some neuroscience will be referenced.

The initial and instinctive reason for considering social theoretical disciplines is relatively straightforward: culture is their stock of trade, more so than applied linguistics, or for that matter even sociolinguistics. It is not that the 'problem' of culture has been resolved, neither theoretically nor analytically, but that one might expect that the level of discussion surrounding the issues in the conceptualization, understanding, analysis and study of culture is more advanced on many levels, and has focused more on its problematization.

### *A Triad of Interests*

The theories of culture and society from which this thesis advances will in fact be called upon to address the three themes that have been identified as being the overarching critical concerns involved in the development of any pedagogical framework: the ontological status of the object of study; the nature of learning and; the issue of representation, which calls for a discussion and awareness raising of the ethics of culture teaching and learning.

It is not in any way difficult to find a definition of culture, nor even a theory. The greater problem is to establish a perspective that one can be confident provides one with the 'data' one seeks. For those who wish to analyze language in its social context 'the choice of a social theory becomes paramount, since one of the fundamental questions is which elements of the social context affect the production and understanding of language in natural settings' (Lavandera 1988: 6). It is the primary and *a priori* assumption of this thesis that there is 'content'<sup>2</sup> in culture that can furnish the learner with understanding and aid in the development of communicative ability. In order to remain transparent, it is therefore crucial to elaborate what this cultural content is in a theoretically satisfactory manner: and this goes beyond definition. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Content has here been placed in scare quotes to suggest that it is not assumed that it refers to material, fixed, or even easily representable elements.

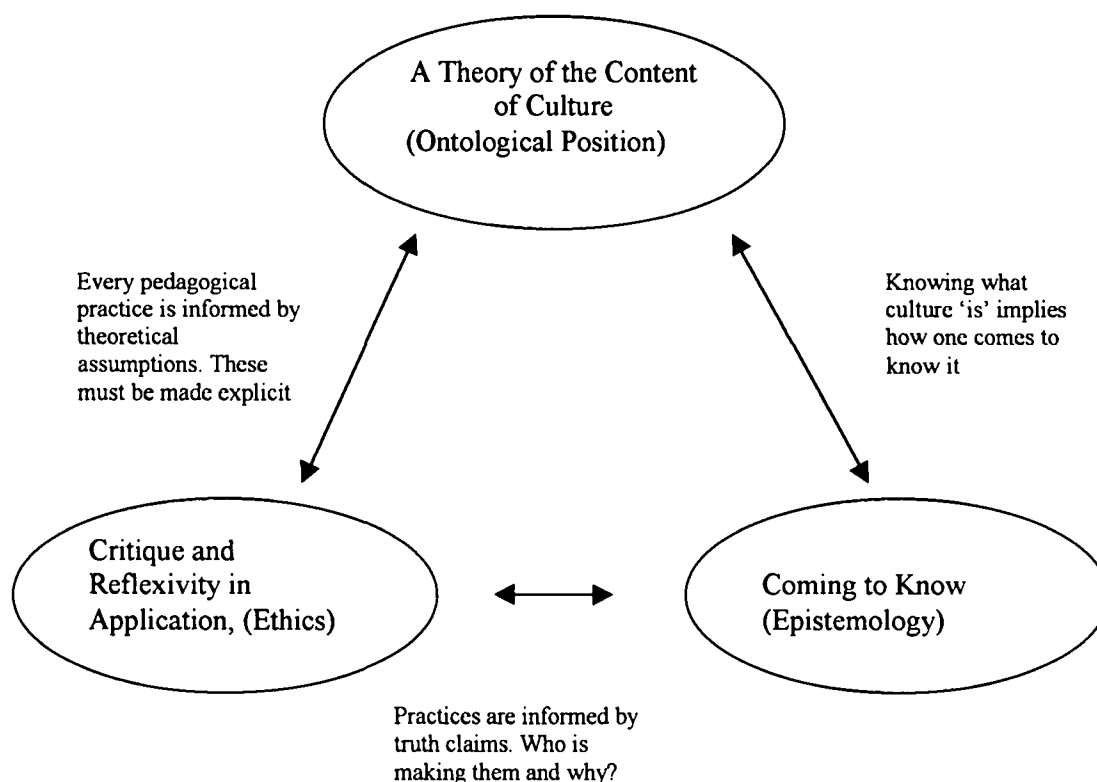
only then that any method which seeks to elicit knowledge of this content can be determined. Social theory can inform the formulation of principles and the development of a pedagogical framework to put them in practice, as it is equipped with an array of conceptual tools from which to choose.

To establish any ontology of culture one cannot escape questions as to how people come to know of it. In other words, epistemology is never distant from questions as to the nature of culture and its functioning. Social theory is therefore also concerned with understanding the epistemological processes of being a cultural member, that is, with attempting to explain how social agents become knowing and able social agents. While much of SLA research seems to promote the notion that learners are autonomous, acultural receptacles of a foreign system of communication, independent of any contexts not only of learning but of social action, the fact that there is no 'no context' demands an awareness of the fact that language learning is inseparably a form of acculturation. It is therefore important to establish FLT principles based on theories that go some way towards explaining this acculturation process. In other words, while language learners can not be thought of as epistemological and empirical blank slates, since they are already acculturated, it is important to understand the implications of epistemological theories that explain the process of socialization, rather than, say, language acquisition. In this way epistemological theory enters into discussions concerning the establishment of learning 'conditions'.

Finally, because 'what is there and what we know about it are problematics reduced by ideology and political action (Anderson 1996: 48), the third theme deals with developing what might be called 'reflexive pedagogy' (to appropriate a term from 'reflexive sociology' [Wacquant 1996]), with which to address the discourses and legitimizing moves that are instituted in SLA and FLT. As with sociology and anthropology, which have had to deal with issues related to their representation and construction of society and the cultural other, it is argued that so too should foreign language pedagogy not only critique various positions and methods from the viewpoint of internally sanctioned dispositions, but critique its very justification as a

discipline and the way it constructs its knowledge. While it would be presumptuous to accuse the whole field of applied linguistics and foreign language pedagogy of unethical conduct, the issue that all procedures and methods are driven by interests of legitimization and theoretical assumptions which are left undisclosed is nonetheless largely neglected. When learners are called upon to memorize words, partake in role-play or complete tasks, they are in effect called upon to actualize epistemological assumptions – truth claims – which are made on their behalf: activity X will lead to knowledge of the language. The aim therefore is to critique some of the practices of FLT (those of communicative language teaching to be more precise, for reasons which will become clear shortly), and the theoretical assumptions behind them. Thus equipped with awareness that there are also ethical issues involved in the representation of culture it is of course imperative that this awareness is foregrounded in the advancement of a theoretical framework for the study of culture in foreign language learning.

Clearly all of these issues are deeply interrelated. It has been argued that the study of culture requires a coherent and explicit theory with which to approach the study of culture, that this theory take into account the processes of learning in social context, and that any framework that is advanced must acknowledge the ethical issues involved in doing so. Each of these issues informs and implies the others, and the linear presentation of them here should be seen as nothing more than the constraints imposed on the nature of argument and writing. The following diagram aims to illustrate this interconnectedness and present a triangulated version of the three main themes that this thesis will discuss:



*Figure 1.1 Trinity of Issues for Culture in FLT*

### **1.3.1 A Note on Methodology**

This thesis will be philosophical and theoretical rather than empirical in its exposition, and the application of 'foreign' theoretical concepts can be considered its methodology. That is, the method this thesis employs is to consider three broad areas relevant to foreign language pedagogy, namely culture, epistemology and disciplinary ethics, and then choose concepts and issues from each of them to contribute to the development of a theoretically grounded and (hopefully) coherent foreign language teaching framework. Moreover, these concepts are used to critique and deconstruct current pedagogy – more specifically as found in the kinds of exercises published in (ELT) textbooks and which imply to either be communicative or even 'culturally aware'. This task obviously requires considerable and diverse reading, making up a bulk of this thesis. Somewhat untraditional for a thesis, this should also be considered

as part of it 'methodology' in that it is research that has not been done for the field of applied linguistics or foreign language pedagogy.

It must be added that it will not be a simple interdisciplinary transfer, for social theory is, like all disciplines, a field of various and competing theories, frameworks and models subject to myriad interpretations. Though the aim is not to apply a specific theory, the thesis can be seen to be informed by poststructural and postmodernist positions, the reason for which will be discussed in the next section. As such, the straight choice and adoption of *a* method to positively solve *a* problem would be somewhat contrary the spirit of postmodernism.

Four general areas can be identified to which relevant issues and concepts may be applied.

Social theory may prove useful as a source of instruction on how to approach the study and analysis of language as culture. That is, what are the various concerns and questions surrounding the practical problem of studying culture and language?

In turn, the problems that have been aired in social theory and the (postmodern) philosophy of science can be imported to the problems and issues that foreign language teaching will have to deal with. For instance, it is proposed that the concerns of objectivity and representation, and of epistemology and perception, and the ideologies behind analytical methodology have considerable relevance to foreign language teaching as they continue to have in social theory.

Social theory can be surveyed for insights into the process of experience, perception and learning and behavior in terms of treating both learner and native as cultural subjects. In other words, how has social theory addressed the (some might say irresolvable) agency versus structure problem, and which ones may prove useful in foreign language teaching?

Learning and social theory can be used as an approach with which to address the methodological implications of studying culture in an institutionalized setting.



### **1.3.2    *The Limitations of Linguistics<sup>3</sup> as the Only Source***

Corson (1997: 167) notes that mainstream linguistics was used to contribute to early ELT theory-building at the exclusion of other social sciences and has continued to treat other social sciences either as 'feeder disciplines' or to operate autonomously, elaborating its own theoretical base independently of other disciplines. In order to propose a genuinely critical approach to foreign language pedagogy therefore, it is necessary to develop a sensibility which does not set out with linguistic conceptions, but challenges these conceptions as at once describing language as an ideologically and semantically neutral 'tool' and attributing language with encompassing powers of communication which it does not possess outright. A foreign language student does have to develop an ability to perceive and produce intelligible utterances, using 'tools' such as words and grammar. But perhaps the language learning challenge neither begins with these concepts nor ends with them. Similarly, by seeing meanings as being contained within and internal to these tools of language, the linguistic system is seen as the only system worthy of study. This is clearly misleading. But when scholars devise communicative language tasks so that learners' 'attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form' (Nunan 1989: 10), they reveal an inadequate understanding of the complex social processes, pragmatics and relationships involved in its production: to them (the transfer of) meaning is another linguistic concern, a self-contained process, not a philosophical and social 'problem' involving historical spatial and conceptual 'assemblages,' to use a word favored by Deleuze and Guattari (1988).

There is thus another reason for choosing social theory and this is that (applied) linguistics as a source for language teaching can be said to be limited in its explanatory potential because it represents only one analytic perspective. To put it in

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I generally do not make specific distinctions between various schools or branches of linguistics (such as formal and applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics). Thus, when I use the term 'linguistics' my intention is not to lump them all together as a unified discipline. Rather, with this term I am referring to a general (not disciplinary or methodological) scientific approach to language. It is also important to note that 'linguistic' is often used in adjective form (i.e. 'referring to language'), rather than in reference to any academic approach.

another way, the fact that is seen to provide language pedagogy with its methodological *raison d'être* is a major and often unchallenged assumption. Yet it has been argued that one of the major theoretical concerns is that, by drawing on linguistic research, language in pedagogical environments is objectified (Morgan 1997). One might argue then that such an objectified linguistic or 'purified' language is best left in the realm of linguistics rather than language teaching, since social interaction is not 'the sort of intentional action which many theories conceive of as action following a rule' (Calhoun 1995: 143). This is not to say that there are no rules or norms, but that rules do not necessarily sit on the surface of (every) social action, able to be observed, learned and complied with by anyone who passes by and is willing to memorize them. Communicative (rather than objective) language does not necessarily possess the 'obvious' linguistic units, which, having been extracted from contexts of social practice, can be used to restructure a solid, transparent and real 'meta-unit' of communicative competence. As one scholar notes

it is ironic that applied linguistics – whose core business is communication in its direct form – has been slow to engage with the work around literacy, discourse and culture which has relocated interest in language in a much broader cultural frame; but it explains the continuing lack of a clearly formulated approach to working with culture in the language classroom. Language teachers have had no real tools for "teaching" culture (Carr 1999: 104).

The philosophical project of Deleuze and Guattari in general challenges the 'binary logic', the dichotomizing thought, the 'arborescent model' of Western (and human) conceptualizations, replacing it with a system of multiplicities and assemblages. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), one of the first models they challenge is the linguistic:

Our criticism of...linguistic models is not that they are too abstract but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough, that they do not reach the *abstract machine* that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 7, emphasis in original).

Thus, Deleuze and Guattari reconceptualize the relationship between content (in their sense, the materiality of language, including signified and grammar, usually referred

to as formal properties) and expression (the ideological, semiotic component of enunciation, signifier), considering each to be independent (rather than holding expression as a representation of content) and perpetually operating on each other (1988: 89, 91). More importantly, they object to either still being 'bound up with a supposedly autonomous and constant structure' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 91). Their aim, instead, is to conceive of the 'true abstract machine' as an 'assemblage in its entirety' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 91), which is not arborescent but superlinear – 'a plane whose elements no longer have a fixed linear order'. The term they give to this plane is their famous 'rhizome', to which more attention will be given later.

Structural, or modern linguistics, of which Saussure is recognized as the founder, has enjoyed relevance and canonical status in both social theory and linguistics proper since its inception. The reasons for this are clear enough in that Saussure argued that language could be studied as a scientific system, best removed from the impurities of its contextualized use. But the language system as it is described by experts (research or pedagogic) simply should not be considered to offer a universal and self-explanatory account of language, and certainly not the only. The manner in which linguistics-based approaches describe the target language is often a language in itself that learners must first grasp. They present, say, grammatical elucidation (or obfuscation) as though they were obviously the only means to clarify a given construction, that is, they assume that 'the characteristics of the content are self-evident' (Anderson 1996: 164). But which foreign language learner has not been dumbfounded by points of grammar as though they were formulas in an esoteric algebra? Which teacher has not felt that a point of grammar is not as apparent and illuminating of a type of expression as it is presented? How can the instruction to 'Write brief dialogues describing some good and bad things that have happened (or will happen) to you. Use the phrases in the list' (Keller and Warner 1988: 18) be said to reflect language in use, knowledge of language, or competence to place it in context?

Simply put, the study of language should be seen as much a social issue as an academic challenge. To learn how to 'communicate' involves becoming privy to the implicit social, normative, pragmatic and ideological facets and topics of the speech community of which one is (either temporarily or permanently) a part. It is with and through and because of cultural meaning systems that hierarchies, classes, identities, perspectives, tastes and lifestyles are practiced, manifested and to a large extent become observable. The formal teaching of language, inasmuch as it decides what to teach – albeit with good intentions – is thus implicated in the problematization of social and cultural studies. That is, topics such as identity, power, socialization, ideology, epistemology, reality, truth and so on that contemporary social theory has examined, are equally relevant in a field that hopes to teach a system that largely enacts them. It is because language is never neutral or universally practiced across its social domains that language pedagogy becomes involved in problems beyond those of linguistics.<sup>4</sup> Thus to accord culture its due importance for language learning should not be seen as an act of subversion. There is no hidden agenda to *replace* 'language' with another uncritically accepted system ('culture'?). But the agenda is to gain a deeper understanding of language (and more importantly the people who communicate) in social existence - an existence it *shares* with other systems of meaning.

#### **1.4 The Postmodern Slant**

What is it? Everyone who has written a book or article on postmodernism begins with an apology for the inability to define the term. This is understandable, for if one could define it, it would not be postmodernism since it would then have an identifiable referent (Bell 1996, cited in Antonio 1998: 22).

It is by now quite evident that in considering as logocentric, interested, or decentralized such issues as reference and representation, meaning, identity, social

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu has written that sociology 'can free itself from all the forms of domination which linguistics and its concepts still exercise today over the social sciences' (1991: 37). It is perhaps ironic that this thesis aims to approach language learning and teaching by employing the ideas from movements that have themselves been dominated by linguistics and only recently attempted to emancipate themselves from it!

practice, sources of pedagogical authority, and the focus on social and critical theory as potential informants to language pedagogy, that this thesis is inextricably involved in a form of post-structural, and/or postmodernist discourse.<sup>5</sup> While it would be more accurate in fact to consider it as a thesis with an eclectic range of sources, it is freely 'admitted' (there's the apology!) that postmodern arguments have informed and inspired it, if attributions to many of the authors referenced herein are seen to be representative of the 'movement' (despite the irony that most of them do not accept the label 'postmodernist' themselves). And since one of the purposes of this thesis is to critique current definitions, treatments and applications of notions such as culture, communication and meaning, and is thus *linked but not bound to* postmodernist sociological discourse, it may well be necessary, not to apologize, but at least to inform the reader, and provide a short discussion of what this will entail.

Postmodernism and poststructuralism are by no means uncontroversial positions. Indeed, their theories infamously and to many academics, unforgivably, preclude them from being 'positions' at all, *especially* since they have often deliberately resisted definition. There is even considerable doubt as to whether postmodernism represents any kind of epochal change at all, as many of its themes – perspectivism, relativity, subjectivity, as well as representative authors such as Heidegger and Nietzsche, are obviously not new (or even currently writing).

And in keeping with its interest in plurality and perspectivism, it is fitting that postmodernism has in fact a number of origins. Calhoun (1995) distributes postmodernist evolution across four trends, representing 1) an artistic movement set against modernist architecture, literature and art, 2) a social, critical movement stemming from poststructuralism, 3) an 'anti-foundational' philosophical position, attacking metaphysical claims to 'an external standpoint for judging truth' (Calhoun

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio (1998) writes: 'The more delimited concept of 'poststructuralism' overlaps with and is usually treated as a root and branch of postmodernism' (23, footnote 2). This thesis will likewise treat the two terms as essentially related, and will interchange the terms in accordance with academics and theorists who are attributed as being proponents of one or the other.

1995: 100), and 4) an analysis of the historical shift from industrial sociology and economics to the 'information society,' globalization and the 'culture industry,' which emphasizes the production of signification.

Although all are related, of primary interest in this thesis are the second and third postmodernist versions. It is 'the critique of subject-centred reason, monological texts or readings, grand narratives, general truth claims, and the normalization of Enlightenment rationality' (Calhoun 1995: 100) which will be considered.

An interpretation of poststructuralist discourse will thus be used to analyze the dominant approaches to language and language teaching both in light of ontological and epistemological interests. While these other approaches, mostly with a positivist bent, are generally comfortable with the (unity of) objects they study and measure, postmodernists prefer to consider how such objects of analysis are discursively constructed in the 'first' place. That is, instead of having a relatively comfortable idea of what the object of study is, exploring ways in which that can be taught, and conducting quantitative research to 'prove' (or disprove) the effectiveness of the methodology, as much FLT based research does, the aim here is more to question the status of pedagogical objects, and to develop the argument, firstly, that there is no unitary object which pedagogy can impart (and much less impart to unitary objects). Indeed, the very hope to *impart* something is considered misleading and socio-politically motivated, and a focal position is that learners of foreign cultures and languages must be equipped with ways to explore, discover, invent and even imbibe the multiplicity of the social world. The onus is on the learner's possibility of (re) constructing the (or better, his or her) world within the paradigms of the foreign culture.

Subsequent pedagogical questions include: how can an institutional learning environment help 'stabilize' the relativism that postmodernist theory can lead us to? How can we (who?) re-enter a conventionalized reality without representing it as fixed? What strategies are, or can be made available for learners to appreciate and

effectively prepare for the dynamic, political, meaningful, strategic world that is the target culture?

The issue of representation and practices that legitimize it is another major area for postmodernists. To become aware of how discursive and academic fields constitute, legitimize and recognize their problems allows us to realize that research and pedagogical practices are always motivated and political, and that in fact the problems can be identified differently and can support alternative approaches. That is, second language acquisition (SLA) research and theory, applied linguistics, and foreign language pedagogy, as self-legitimizing discourses, should no longer monopolize the problem of language learning, asserting for instance that 'real language' occurs in 'real life' and that therefore language teaching must be 'concerned with reality' (Littlewood 1981: 95). Even if common sense tells us that this is 'true' it is not a minor issue to question how a discipline can make claims to be responsible for, then devise pedagogical methods which assert connections to reality: linguistic 'reality' may well be different for the researcher, the teacher, and the learner, and this demands recognition at the methodological as well as institutional level.

Most disciplines in the social sciences have in fact had quite revolutionary upheavals in recent years which have 'cast great doubt upon the classical notions of truth, reality, meaning and knowledge' (Sarup 1993: 97). This poststructuralist and postmodernist wave however, seems, until very recently at least (and then only in murmurs) to have been quietly disregarded in most second language research, foreign language pedagogy and applied linguistics in general (Pennycook 1990). Of these murmurs, scholars have in recent years begun to address notions such as cultural identity (Morgan 1997; McNamara 1997; Norton Pierce 1995a; Norton 1997; Zoreda 1997), research issues (Block 1996; Green, Franquiz and Dixon 1997; Norton Pierce 1995; Roberts 1997), learning theory (Atkinson 2002; Firth and Wagner 1997; Lantolf 2000) cultural relativity (Holliday 1999; Kramsch 1991; 1993; Kubota 1999a 1999b) and power relations (Thomas 1996) that have been cast in a poststructural light. Pennycook (1990, 2001) has specifically addressed poststructural theory in

terms of its potential to assist applied linguistics in a reappraisal of its foundations, and since that article there have been a smattering of attempts to reinvigorate the field of language teaching from interdisciplinary perspectives. However, in sum, this interest has as yet not made a significant impact in Foreign Language methodology – Genishi notes the dearth of poststructuralist-based interest in L2 studies (1999: 289) – and little of this research has taken social/sociological and critical theory as its guiding framework. As such, it is hoped that this thesis will offer a timely injection of postmodern critique, eclecticism and ‘reflexivity’.

Finally, discussing the consequences of postmodern thought on education in general Reichenbach writes:

Postmodern plurality as a sociological finding and a philosophical problem has...an impact on the curriculum with regard to at least three aspects: (1) the status of knowledge, (2) the teaching method, and (3) the normative dimension (Reichenbach 1999: 241).

It is the purpose of this thesis to address the ‘postmodern impact’ on each of these three areas, in relation to the teaching and study of culture in foreign language pedagogy. Specifically, it is necessary to a) bear in mind the questioned status of ‘language’ as formulated by a cognitive, objective, paradigmatic linguistics, which is in turn sanctioned as the object to be known by pedagogy, b) critique the legitimated methodology used to impart the sanctioned object of knowledge, and c) analyze the features and structure of the institutional environment for its epistemological ‘worth’, that is to say, whether the norms and regulations of the institution, in general, provide and facilitate conditions that are of benefit to the learner of a foreign language and culture. Added to this, it is necessary, d) to examine the implications of various postmodern positions as they are applied to SLA and FLT research and practice.

Another way of seeing language learning is that it is useful to conceive of the language learner as the embodiment of the ‘postmodern condition’ (Lyotard 1984). As a person confronted with and essentially disempowered (relations of power are present always and everywhere) by a foreign language community, there are no



patterns – either of meaning, social practices, phonetics etc. – all of which have a normative powers in contexts of (inter)action – to which the learner has recourse. Yet it is recourse to these ‘contexts’ which establishes historical antecedents. It is a familiar paradox: how am I supposed to *get* experience if experience is what I already need? It is possible to say that for the learner everything is meaningless because in essence everything is equally meaningful. There is nothing for the learner to differentiate any of the patterns to draw and make connections between schemas and structures which the native would recognize as intelligible and appropriate to a context. Sounds cannot be differentiated enough to perceive them as meaningful; words, when heard or seen, give no clue as to their orientation and behavior can not be assessed against known patterns. In a way, the learner is deaf and mute and ultimately ‘savage’ in the absolute and unharnessed relativity and free play of signification.

But of course the discussion cannot end there, and with this in mind the problem is recast in a pedagogical as opposed to purely theoretical context. What can one do – and aim for – when it is held that full ‘understanding’ is an impossibility, that it is ‘partial, relational and necessarily incomplete’ (Kerdeman 1999: 227)? How can one aid the student and what strategies can the student employ to *reduce* and *narrow* and ultimately *mobilize* the range of possibilities of practical meaning – not finitely or to the point of transparency and fixity, but to the point of sensibility? How does the learner understand what is - and then become – ‘socially presentable’?

As a critical, analytical and theoretical exercise, this thesis does not aim to replace other sources or approaches to foreign language teaching, but to take its legitimate place among them. There is no literal attempt to add to the current ‘body of knowledge’ in FLT in the form of details, results and numbers. Instead, it is hoped that this project will expand the realm of thought, and the possible ways of talking about foreign language learning and teaching. As such, the thesis starts with a call to recognize the interested and consequently examinable foundations upon which various scientific approaches to FLT make claims to ‘truth’ or ‘objectivity’; it then

enters a plane of what many might consider intolerable relativism, and argues its way back to a 'normal' world in which that world is (re)constructed without (or with fewer) representational and absolutist pitfalls. The philosophical and theoretical orientation of this thesis, for this reason, is justified on the grounds that any commitment to teach culture in turn commits foreign language teaching to thoroughly explore the issues behind this objective – if for no other reason than to truly appreciate the complexity of the subject. This thesis thus hopes contribute to such a commitment.

### **1.5 Creating Histories and Spaces**

This project has been entitled 'Creating histories and spaces of meaningful use' because the theoretical model that will be elicited argues that these are the aims and conditions which Foreign Language pedagogy should hope to facilitate. 'Creating histories and spaces,' then, refers to the sociological and philosophical position that language and thus by implication language learning, do not occur in a social and sociohistorical vacuum. 'Histories', because people do not experience life as single, linear and unified, and acquire the ability to adapt to various discourses and situations according to their dynamics and political structures. 'Spaces', both because people inhabit physical as well a conceptual spaces in time and at various times. Neither history nor place exist separately: they are the very parameters and co-ordinates of life and meaning.

The acquisition of histories does not imply merely 'lots of practice', if such practice involves learning that does not in fact resemble language in social settings, such as drills – a method long since (nominally) abandoned, or perhaps even the more modern role plays and simulations which often involve no more than the rehearsal of 'simplified' (i.e. 'purified') scripts. Rather, the person acquires histories – referential networks of knowledge and *social* practice – by being situated (placed) in the events of social life, and in which he/she learns the schemas of social logic by trial and error. These histories do not consist of isolated linguistic events being collected, but grow

as an organic 'dialectic' of and among practices which shape and are shaped by social and psychological responses, motives, needs, ambitions and so on, all of which shape and are shaped by cultural imperatives. And this orientation in turn reflects a view that will inform language teaching and learning not to see the acquisition of histories (or anything else) as a linear and sequential process, but as something which is in a sense a cyclical, layered, even random phenomenon where past knowledge informs present interpretation, where future needs inform present directions. That is, there are no 'building blocks' of knowledge (that can be defined, refined, represented or otherwise), but links in a spreading network of references, associations and meanings. Further, history does not occur in closed and one-dimensional environment. Thus the term 'spaces' refers to the distinction between conditions, environments and places in which social practice occurs as distinct from the confined, four-walled, and formally administered and administrated places of classroom language learning *and* the virtual spaces which conflate temporality.

Of course, the notion of *creating* histories both identifies and poses further crucial problems of language learning which is set in the L2 classroom. Primarily, the problem of classroom practice is that, while attempting to attain an academically constituted goal, namely that of definable, quantifiable and testable levels of 'proficiency', or 'competence', it too is constrained by demands of time and space.

This has a number of effects. First, the (presumed) need to structure and organize teaching content, which is based on 'expert' decisions as to how to order such content, *necessarily* enforces the learning process: 'Between ten and eleven o'clock every Monday students will (or must) be ready to acquire aspect X (as presented in chapter 3, page 52 of their textbooks) of language Y'. Secondly, the desire for economic and efficient teaching and acquisition is possibly a primary cause for the search for 'essences' of knowledge of language – in other words a search for 'shortcuts' to proficiency. The orderly teaching of grammar and formal structure has been the traditional shortcut, while recently, with the realization of the 'value' (as though it were an additional commodity) of meaning and interaction, Communicative

Language Teaching has become another. At any rate, formal, structured language learning clearly involves the *compression* of time as well as space. Learning institutionally demands that everything is squeezed into specious conditions, whereas communication arguably occurs in 'real-time', and in normal conditions.

The issue of hypostatizing culture through teaching method, or through choosing representative resources or materials, provides another source of tensions that need addressing in this study. Is it sufficient, and efficient, for example, to identify a practice as rule-governed, as an easily accessible and understandable feature of cultural life? Or would doing so extract a superficial glimpse of the target culture with little understanding of the tensions which occur constantly within them, as felt by the native inhabitants of them (Kramsch 1991; 1993; Liddicoat 1999; FitzGerald 1999)? Whether culture can be treated as self-contained and rule-governed a system as language is an important issue.

There are then, two, *almost* separate problems that Foreign Language pedagogy faces: that of developing a deeper conceptualization of the nature and workings of culture as manifested in social interaction, and that of applying this conceptualization to contexts in which are characterized by their own motives, operations and structures. In other words, we have on the one hand a 'simple' dichotomy of culture versus objectifying, defining classroom practices, and on the other hand classroom practices *which are necessarily part of cultural and social practices*. The question is: can one learn, or develop the ability to engage in foreign practices while one is embedded in other – also inextricably cultural – practices ('teaching', 'learning'), which have their own organizational logic?

In short, 'history' takes us beyond paradigmatic language and into the social atmosphere, while 'space' in this context takes us out of the class, at least in some way. Both of these movements are considered crucial, if foreign language pedagogy genuinely has communication in mind.

## **1.6 The Aims and Goals of this Thesis**

Although most aims and purposes of this thesis have already been described, it is necessary to summarize them for clarification.

### **1.6.1 Aims**

1. To identify and discuss pivotal issues the teaching and study of culture entails in the Foreign Language Learning.
2. To apply social and anthropological theory toward developing a deeper understanding of the issues involved in the proposal to study culture in a FL course.
3. To examine critically communicative language teaching from this perspective. That is, to relate these issues of culture study to communicative language teaching methodology.
4. To argue that language learning is about the accumulation of histories of meaningful, purposeful and above contextual application and action. Moreover, to argue that communication and culture learning are indeterminate, ambiguous and relative processes, and that they should be treated as such in the foreign language classroom.
5. To reconceptualize what an 'effective' language and culture learning environment would look like, based on a triangulation of theoretical, epistemological and ethical considerations.
6. To argue that language teaching should not be conceived of as the transfer of knowledge and meaning from an authoritative, omniscient source (institution, teacher) to the learner, but that it is about facilitating the development of analytical tools which serve to assist the learner's perception of social practice.

In light of these aims, the objectives of the thesis are:

### **1.6.2 Objectives**

1. To offer a framework of an *ideal* FL course.

2. To conceptualize a theoretical framework that broadens language and language learning beyond linguistic systems and which is characterized by having the cultural and social aspects brought to the fore in the construction of meanings and knowledge and in the ability to take account of the relativity of these meanings.
3. To work toward outlining a model of language learning that incorporates guidelines which are consistent with the aims set out in thesis, and with which can act as a guide in the development of methodology which genuinely immerses a learner in contexts that broaden the learner's experience and engages the learner in purposive, motivated and socially contingent communication.

### **1.6.3    *About an 'Ideal' Language Learning Environment***

This is a thesis concerned largely with the epistemological questions surrounding the learning of a foreign language, and commensurately can be considered an attempt to discuss the issues of what is *relevant* to the foreign language learner. As such, while variables such as motivation, age, location, cultural learning styles, access to materials and a plethora of others are certainly acknowledged as contingencies and thus 'hindrances', as it were, to a perfect learning world, one aim here is to better grasp the process of learning *per se*. In this way it is possible to imagine a learning environment in which the conditions, resources and other requirements posited can be facilitated which (initially) are free from the shackles of institutional demands and considerations<sup>6</sup>.

The notion of and hope to theoretically develop an ideal language learning environment may be seen by some as a convenient way to avoid what are called the 'real' conditions and variables encountered in the classroom and that positing or imagining an ideal environment is purposeless if it has no practical application. But if it is argued that the institution does not allow for the provision of ideally necessary conditions, then one enters self-defeating spiral in which learning in the institution will never truly realize its full potential. Institutional settings have themselves created

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<sup>6</sup> For this reason no specific educational policies are the target of this thesis.

and contributed to the conditions they then want to take into account when offering ever new methodologies and pedagogical practices, without, it seems, questioning the fundamental organization of institutions at the ideological and practical level (at least where FLT is concerned). In this light, there would be nothing except continued belief in the status quo, and the political dynamics of current education systems, that prevents radical change in the way foreign languages are pedagogically handled. The model to be outlined here is therefore ideal, but only because it does not yet exist, not because it cannot. The purpose for describing a model then, is precisely to envision the potential of the institution.

One proviso is necessary however, in adding that the ideal institution to be envisaged is at the tertiary level. This is for a number of reasons. First, because arguably the tertiary institution in general is more amenable to structural and procedural changes. Tertiary institutions are in many ways more autonomous from bureaucratic stipulates and state standardization practices and thus can change their manner of delivery more readily. Second, because – at least traditionally – the student in the tertiary institution is expected to engage in their subjects more critically, intellectually and independently than at prior levels. While this has not necessarily and always been the case in Foreign Language Teaching (for example, due to rote learning practices) these expectations can more readily be transferred to the study of culture in foreign language courses.

### **1.7 The Outline of this Thesis**

The purpose of chapter 1 is to provide a general outline of the topic, so as to orient the reader to the aims and objectives of the thesis, as well as justify the relevance and importance of the chosen research project and its methodology.

Chapter 2 provides an outline of the approach to language teaching that is known as the Communicative Approach, or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This is because it is currently the major theoretical and practical paradigm in foreign

language teaching, and this thesis emerges from the tenets and principles it espouses, by identifying a number of limitations, weaknesses, and misapplications.

Chapter 3 reviews the current perspectives and approaches to teaching and studying culture. Topics to be discussed include: definitions of culture, theories of acculturation, teaching practices and procedures. A short critique is also made that points out areas of weakness of Culture in Foreign Language Learning (CIFLL) and which thereby points out the need for further development and discussion.

Categorizing and grouping people, attempting to understand their actions, formulating theories as to how their meanings arise and are exchanged, and developing methods to unlock the 'secrets' of human practices, rituals and symbolic processes have been subjects of interest and debate for centuries. Chapter 4 offers a historical tour of this interest and then develops a general theoretical approach which it is argued can be applied in the foreign language course.

Questions of knowledge and learning are the concern of chapter 5. It considers theories of learning from a number of perspectives, which are seen to combine to offer a number of principles and fundamentals of learning that can inform the development of a pedagogical model in which a range of conditions are met.

Chapter 6 delves into the often controversial topic of the motivations, processes, politics and ethics of scientific knowledge production and the impact this has on teaching practices. It takes into account postmodern arguments that science is a narrative, that it has become embroiled in a discourse of performativity and economy, in which what is discovered is based on what is *a priori* considered important to discover, thus in effect preordaining knowledge and 'tainting' its veneer of objectivity and transparency. This is seen to have consequences in the field of education.

Where chapters 4 to 6 are aimed toward outlining a number of principles which can be applied to the study of culture in institutional language learning, chapter 7 returns



to communicative language teaching. Equipped with the principles and conceptual approach that have been formulated, a more in-depth and specified critique of CLT is offered so as to illuminate the weaknesses of teaching practices and methods that have emerged from this approach. Thus, a number of representative tasks and activities that are suggested in popular textbooks are analyzed in light of the perspective and principles herein developed.

In chapter 8 the principles and arguments of the thesis are brought together in order to work toward a principled, justified and coherent model of culture in foreign language teaching and learning. However, the provision of a *specific* model as such is not considered the task of this thesis, since it is argued that specific model should be developed in light of local requirements, opportunities and facilities. The aim to work *toward* a model raises the bar however, as to what institutions should expect of themselves, and more importantly perhaps, what learners should come to expect of institutions. The question to be addressed then is: What does it mean to create, enable or facilitate histories and spaces of meaningful use? rather than: What exactly should we do in the class in order to create, enable or facilitate histories and spaces? Where the former question hopes to furnish teachers and researchers with *ideas*, the latter would only serve to prevent and stop them, and this is far from the hope of this thesis.

Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter. It discusses the limitations of the theoretical outlook and practical outcome of the thesis and suggests areas for further research and consideration. Indeed, the limitations of the thesis are seen to be positive in the sense that they will hopefully generate more exciting discussions and ideas, and therefore more promising directions in our quest to develop a practical and successful approach to the presentation and study of culture in the foreign language class.

### ***1.7.1 A Note on Style and Language***

It goes without saying that every writer has his or her style and it is necessary here to justify some of the uses of language that will be found in this thesis.

- To begin, the topics in this thesis are often very abstract. Notions such as culture or reality must be however be used for efficiency and brevity, even while the implied singularity of these terms (that there is *a* culture for example) is critiqued. In many cases ‘scare quotes’ are used to indicate their questionable status.
- Likewise, I will interchange disciplinary terms such as ‘social theory’, ‘sociological theory’, ‘sociology’ and even ‘anthropology’. While they can be separated in strict terms, and of course represent different fields of research, I have opted to treat them as a collection of perspectives to a general approach to culture – in distinction to SLA’s or FLT’s ‘general approach’ to language, and interchange them to avoid awkward repetitiveness.
- I have used American spelling, except where British spelling is found in quotations.
- I have also mixed the use of gender in this thesis. The reader will find the use of masculine pronouns for some example, feminine for others, and his/her variations for others still.
- I have used common acronyms such as CLT and FLT, and introduced others, such as CIFLL (Culture in Foreign Language Learning).
- No amount of proof reading that I or others do will catch all the rogue typographical errors, grammatical hiccups or stylistic embarrassments. All errors are of course mine alone, and I hope to be forgiven using the occasional split infinitive, losing the occasional apostrophe, mixing the odd metaphor, pondering the pedantry or committing any other graphic misdemeanor.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Communicative Language Teaching: The Pedagogical (R)Evolution**

Communicative language teaching has represented an evolution (or slow revolution) in that it has since its introduction affected a steady change in perspective and approach across all facets of foreign language teaching, from syllabus to content, from methodology to assessment. Research, theory and pedagogical application done in its name has emerged as the ‘in vogue’, and most dominant and well-established orientation in foreign and second language pedagogy throughout the world (Richards and Rodgers 1986, Thompson 1996, Widdowson 1990). Expanded, supplemented, defended, developed, and of course critiqued for more than thirty years, CLT continues to be widely referred to in pedagogical research and practice, and in fact has no real successor which can claim to offer a principled, discipline-level opposition or alternative to its basic tenets.

This study is not strictly *about* communicative language teaching, nor should it be thought of as an offering to amplify it. There are two important reasons for its inclusion here, however. First, since this thesis is oriented towards establishing a theory of language use in its social context, it means that CLT is a philosophical and pedagogical forerunner and benefactor of it, and it is therefore felt that its role in campaigning for a greater awareness of contextual and social factors in communication should be acknowledged. Second, because a significant part of this study is to point out the limitations and weaknesses of pedagogical activities and methods of the recent past – activities designed in the name of CLT – it is of course

important to provide a background as to its perspective. It is to these ends that this chapter contributes to the foundations of any theoretical framework that arises.

## **2.1 Communicative Competence**

Foreign language teaching made a conceptual change when it was decided that its main objective was to develop the ability for the learner to communicate, to be able to interact face-to-face rather than to be able to read the literary classics of another culture. In order to meet this objective, scholars began to concentrate on formulating an understanding of what communication was, and how it was achieved by (native) speakers. In the process, they encountered and described the notion of communicative competence, the teaching of which eventually became a driving motive of the Communicative Approach.

One of the earliest, if not original, appearances of the notion of competence was in linguistics, in which it was considered the more significant and analytically relevant half in the competence-performance dichotomy, as most formally described by Chomsky (1965). In Chomsky's formulation, competence referred to a person's abstract knowledge of the language, that is, as an ideal system, whereas performance referred to the 'actual use of language in concrete situations' (Chomsky 1965: 4). For Chomsky and the majority of linguists at the time, determining the underlying structure of language as a self-contained system, of which speakers are supposed to have implicit and underlying knowledge, was the object of analysis.

Brumfit (1984) writes of three main responses to the competence-performance dichotomy thus posited. Theorists chose either to accept it; deny its usefulness, or extend the notion (Brumfit 1984: 24-25). In relation to language pedagogy, the latter two positions have since been the most explored, with particular reference in particular on the work of Austin, Searle, Firth, Halliday and Hymes (Berns 1984; Brown 1987; Richards and Rodgers 1986), all of whom were more interested in

understanding the role of sociological factors in what is variously referred to as the communicative interaction, the speech act, the utterance, among others, rather than the purely linguistic fact.

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1972), developed a theory of communication as a series of speech-, or illocutionary acts, rather than isolated sentences, in which communicating is driven by purpose to achieve an effect. For Searle it is not 'the symbol or word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol or word or sentence, which is the unit of linguistic communication, but rather...the *production* of the token in the performance...that constitutes the basic unit of linguistic communication' (1972: 137 emphasis in original). Utterances in speech acts have what Austin calls 'illocutionary force', that is, have the power to bring about consequences and effects in the listener's reaction, attitude, behavior and so forth. Competence, from this perspective, is thus seen to be an ability to create intended effects. From this theory, it was concluded that 'second language learners need to understand the purpose of communication, developing an awareness of what the purpose of a communicative act is and how to achieve that purpose through linguistic forms' (Brown 1987: 202).

Firth's complementary version of competence was an originator<sup>1</sup> of the highly influential functional view of language (Brown 1987: 202, Savignon 1990). He defined meaning as 'function in context' (Berns 1990: 7) and his philosophy of language emphasized its sociological dynamics, and the importance of analyzing language as it is used among speakers. This was taken up by Halliday (1989), who likewise questions Chomsky's definition of competence, and following his 'language in a social-semiotic perspective' went on to postulate seven overarching functions of language: instrumental, regulatory, representational, interactional,

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<sup>1</sup> Berns (1990) discusses the functionalist linguistics of Firth - said to be part of the British school - the scholars belonging to the Prague school of roughly the same era, and the Neo-Prague school. While in some ways distinct, they all concentrated on how language 'worked' to create response and effects.

personal, heuristic and imaginative (Brown 1987). Here communicative competence is seen to be represented by an ability to perform a number of desired objectives and purposes in a social setting, and for this reason it was felt that 'the forms of language used to accomplish the functions must become part of the total linguistic repertoire of the second language learner' (Brown 1987: 204). It is also because language is considered to have a purposive function, that the 'language as tool' metaphor was established (Berns 1990).

For Hymes, who Brumfit (1984) suggests is the most influential figure in communicative language teaching, competence refers to a larger range of characteristics which comprise communicative ability, and the following description has often been referred to in CLT literature. According to Hymes, communicative competence can be determined with respect to

1. whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
2. whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails (Hymes 1978: 19, emphasis in original )

Like the other theorists, Hymes sees his concept of competence as correcting Chomsky's duality. While the first two categories indicate linguistic knowledge, the other two characteristics place this knowledge in interactive settings, so that the competence-performance duality are not seen as separable, but as parts of unified whole. For Chomsky, argues Hymes, the social and contextual feasibility and appropriateness of an utterance are considered to be issues concerned with performance, and irrelevant for the study of language as a system, while for Hymes they are inseparably part of an actor's general ability to communicate. Thus, in his aim to study language ability among speech communities, that is, in contexts of use and performance, Hymes seeks to undermine the linguist's undue emphasis on underlying grammatical competence by arguing that this competence necessarily comprises of more features to make language use actual: in order for speech

communities to share rules for interpretation of speech and conduct 'the sharing of grammatical (variety) rules is not sufficient' (Hymes 1972: 54). He likewise famously argues that 'there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless.' (Hymes 1978: 15)

Many scholars have followed Hymes in refining the notion of communicative competence. In what Brown (1987: 199) writes is 'the reference point for virtually all discussions of communicative competence', Canale and Swain (1980) develop a construct by subdividing competence into four categories: grammatical, discursive, sociolinguistic and strategic, each referring to various levels of ability to communicate within a social context. While grammatical and discursive competence refer to the knowledge of textual and linguistic structure (with discourse here referring to the ability to connect sentences to form a series of utterances), sociolinguistic and strategic competencies extend knowledge of language in use as the ability to function socially and to 'manipulate language in order to meet communicative goals' (Brown 1987: 200), and to strategically activate procedures to overcome communicative difficulties and gaps in knowledge.

In an attempt to refine the construct, Celce-Murcia (1995; also Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell 1995) has elaborated the formulation of competence by focusing on sociolinguistic competence. In the model proposed by Celce-Murcia, communication is comprised of the interplay of the four components of Canale and Swain's model (linguistic, strategic, sociolinguistic and discourse) but with sociolinguistic competence further divided into socio-cultural, formulaic and paralinguistic competencies. Socio-cultural competence refers to a speaker's background knowledge of the target community, formulaic competence to the knowledge of 'activating lexical chunks and prefabricated routines' (Celce-Murcia 1995: 702) and paralinguistic competence to non-verbal aspects of face-to-face interaction, including among other aspects, body language, eye contact, conventions of touch, and use of interpersonal space. In a further elaboration, Celce-Murcia posits discourse competence as the 'core competence' because 'this is where the

other components come together' (Celce-Murcia 1995: 702). Her subsequent argument therefore, is that discourse is the 'component in which (or through which) all the other competencies must be studied' (Celce-Murcia 1995: 704).

In sum, 'communicative competence has shown itself to be a robust and challenging concept for teachers, researchers, and program developers alike' (Savignon 1990: 208). While for 'pure' linguists such as Chomsky competence refers to underlying grammatical knowledge, critical linguists and sociolinguists have developed and elaborated the notion of competence to correlate to communicative function, communicative strategy and sociolinguistic ability. Drawing inspiration from this latter construct, foreign language pedagogy found a source from which it could develop a new theoretical and methodological paradigm, making the ability for the learner to communicate with a native speaker (as opposed to the literary text) its primary pedagogical objective. In foreign language teaching the concept has been applied to stress the 'instrumental' aspects of communication, which has in the main referred to the awareness of and ability to employ *functional* ways of getting things done, such as inviting, agreeing and explaining and *notional* ways to express abstract ideas, emotions and concepts such as location and time (Richards and Rodgers 1986; Wilkins 1976). With this notion of communicative competence in mind, fluency rather than accuracy has become the more important aim. It was the 'notional-functional' syllabus thus established that soon came to be associated with the development of the communicative approach to language teaching, or as Savignon (1990: 209) puts it: the 'term 'communicative' attached itself to programs that used a functional-notional syllabus'.

## **2.2 Communicative Language Teaching**

The changes in perspective introduced by theorists of 'language in use' in the late 1960s had a profound effect in foreign language pedagogy. The stress to achieve the generally posited construct of communicative competence has been 'relentless' (Brown 1987: 212). Just as ethnographers, philosophers of language or social



semioticians saw weaknesses in pure linguistic description for their fields, so too did scholars in foreign language pedagogy become frustrated with practices and theories that focused (just as relentlessly) on the acquisition of linguistic structure (Brumfit and Johnson 1978). Such practices were seen to have failed in equipping learners with the ability to communicate with and comprehend the target language, particularly in oral interaction. While the application of Chomskian linguistics led language teaching not to new objectives, but to 'new ways of teaching the same thing' (Brumfit and Johnson 1978: 3), namely grammar, scholars now posited a view of 'language as communication', and emphasized variety of communicative contexts, practices and functions, and indeed language users, in opposition to methods which considered an ideal and homogenized view of language as used by ideal speakers and hearers. Thus

the term communicative language teaching identifies new pedagogical situations that have grown out of the realisation that knowledge of grammatical forms and structures alone does not adequately prepare learners for effective and appropriate use of the language they are learning (Berns 1990: 79).

Proponents of this approach therefore began to challenge strictly grammatical descriptions of language in the classroom, such as the grammar-translation method, and to see language learning as a process that requires the negotiation of meaning in its social context. In other words, perspectives changed in terms of both the object of study and its method of delivery. Indeed, because the teaching of structure alone was no longer considered to be effective, a commensurate shift in the communicative classroom was to emphasize method. It represented a change in language teaching from the 'medium view' to the 'mediation view', thereby reversing the primacy of syllabus over methodology (Widdowson 1990: 120-1), although obviously questions of syllabus needed to reflect the new methodological thrust. What came to be emphasized was the practice of language, rather than the drilling of linguistic structures, based on the theory that 'meaning can only be achieved through action' (Widdowson 1990: 120). The objective of the communicative approach has been to design a 'pedagogy of discovery' (Widdowson 1990: 120) and the search has been for a methodology that attempts to

engage learners in activities devised to 'achieve purposeful outcomes by *means* of language' (Widdowson 1990: 119, emphasis in original) culminating in the invention of 'tasks for problem solving' (Widdowson 1990: 119). It has also resulted in a 'perennial concern to test different 'methods' to see which one is best, that is, most efficient' (Ferguson and Huebner 1991: 8)

Perhaps because there is no authoritative text or model of the communicative approach (Richards and Rodgers 1986), debate has ensued as to how forceful it is in rejecting or complementing the linguistic description of language. Howatt (1984) divides CLT into weak and strong versions, where the 'weak' aims to activate prior learned linguistic ability in a communicative context and manner, while the 'strong' version claims that language knowledge is stimulated by use of the language system in communication, that is, where learners are thought to acquire knowledge of the language through use only, not through concentrating on its structural features (see also Widdowson 1990: 79). Howatt (1984) suggests that it is the weak version which has become practically the standard practice, an assertion supported by Thompson (1996), for example, who feels that it has been a misconception that CLT rejects grammar teaching outright.

Similarly, Kumaravadivelu (1993) represents communicative language teaching in the form of a continuum that ranges from the traditional structural and content-driven approach to language teaching to task-based and methodologically driven approach:

Content < Form based --- Function based --- Task based > Method  
driven       pedagogy       pedagogy       pedagogy       driven  
(Kumaravadivelu 1993: 73)

Expanding on this, he further describes three main approaches to language teaching: language-centered, learner-centered, and learning-centered. Kumaravadivelu

focuses on learning-centered, task-based approaches<sup>2</sup> and learner-centered approaches.

The communicative approach also took a humanistic turn by focusing on the learner in both pragmatic and psychological terms. With the functional view of language in ascendance, scholars needed to predict the actual, contextual uses to which learners were to put their ability: 'by definition, CLT puts the focus on the learner. Learner communicative needs provide a framework for elaborating program goals in terms of functional competence' (Savignon 1990: 210). In turn, the correct assessment of learner needs is likewise considered to influence attitudes and motivation, in that it is felt that when learners can relate the target language to real use, their motivation will be sustained (Littlewood 1981).

While noting that CLT has relatively little by way of learning theory, Richards and Rodgers' attempt a summary of its central epistemological principles:

Activities that involve real communication promote learning...activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning...language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 72)

In general then, supporters of CLT place a high value on actual communicative practice, and this is borne out by Savignon who asserts that 'no researcher today would dispute that language learning results from participation in communicative events' (Savignon 1990: 214).

### **2.2.1     *The Negotiation of Meaning and CLT***

The nature of 'communicative events' is therefore also a matter of theorizing in CLT, and many writers invoke the construct of the 'negotiation of meaning' to explain or describe them. The argument that CLT provides learners with an

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<sup>2</sup> Kumaravadivelu is in the minority in that he seems to consider task-based approaches as an advance on communicative approaches, rather than as a feature of them, as do most other scholars.

opportunity to 'negotiate' meaning is one of the most common phrases used in its support. However, one might be forgiven for feeling confused as to what *that* means, as it is often difficult to find elaborations of the concept by the writers who invoke it. There seem to be two main conceptualizations. In one, the emphasis seems to be on providing learners with strategies that ensure the correct interpretation of a message or utterance. Savignon writes that learners are encouraged to 'ask for information, to seek clarification, to use circumlocution and whatever linguistic and non-linguistic resources they could muster to negotiate meaning, to *stick to the communicative task at hand*' (Savignon 1990: 209 emphasis added).

Kumaravadivelu has a similar understanding. In his advocacy of task-based pedagogy he suggests that in tasks 'learners' attention is focused on negotiation of meaning and they are required to perform the tasks by self-deploying any or all linguistic repertoire they have developed at that point in time' (Kumaravadivelu 1993: 80). As an illustration he describes a task designed by Prabhu (1987), in which learners are presented with a train timetable, and a set of questions concerning departure and arrival times, travel times and so on.

In the version offered by these examples, the 'negotiation of meaning' thus seems to refer to learners *clarifying* the purposes and intentions of instructors, and the factual content of activities they are expected complete. The idea of sticking to the 'communicative task at hand', moreover, clearly limits the kind of information, knowledge, or competence that is permitted or considered appropriate in order to be representative of an interaction.

Widdowson has a more theoretical understanding of the concept of the negotiation of meaning. For him it refers to the 'continuous process of plotting a position and steering an interpretative course by adjustment and prediction' (Widdowson 1990: 105). To clarify the notion of meaning, he draws on the distinction between symbol – the linguistic sign, and index – its association in context, and talks of them in

relation to their epistemological equivalents of systemic and schematic knowledge. While schematic knowledge is 'shared experience and conventionally sanctioned reality' which has been 'acquired as a condition of entry into a particular culture or sub-culture' (Widdowson 1990: 102), systemic knowledge is properly linguistic, referring that is, to knowledge of syntax, grammar etc. For Widdowson, negotiating 'procedures' come into effect when a reader invokes either type of knowledge in a kind of balancing act when interpreting a text. The receiver interprets a text indexically (i.e. connotatively) by drawing on her shared schematic knowledge with the sender, or symbolically (i.e. referentially), when such a commonality is absent. That is, the interpreter uses systemic/symbolic knowledge to compensate for lack of schematic/indexical knowledge, when she does not share a common background of knowledge with the producer. It is the difference between merely perceiving the words presented, and knowing what they indicate in the given context. Meaning then, is negotiated when there is a '*convergence* of schematic knowledge, achieved by the *conversion* of symbol to index' (Widdowson 1990: 108, emphasis in original).

Applying this theoretical position to language learning, Widdowson ultimately rejects the argument that schematic knowledge can be taught independently of, or without recourse to systemic knowledge (thus reflecting a stance that favors the 'weak' version of CLT). He further argues that schematic knowledge without underlying systematic knowledge results in no more than a 'performance repertoire' which, phrased like this, suggests that Widdowson sees as a defective form of communicative competence. However, he does propose that

the internalization of the system as a communicative resource is only likely to happen when there is a concentration on symbol to index conversion, when the potential value of symbols is actualized indexically in the process of discovering new meanings (Widdowson 1990: 112)

Widdowson (1990: 114) therefore calls for a recognition of the 'contrivance of pedagogy' and the process of guiding learners 'through graded negotiating tasks'. These tasks involve the learner in solving purposeful communicative problems and

not only doing 'linguistic exercises' though there is no strict avoidance of linguistic information. The point of these tasks, (presumably) in converting symbol to index, is that 'learners do not just manipulate language as an end in itself, but realize its potential as a means for achieving outcomes which have an independent point (Widdowson 1990: 173) – hence the discovery of 'new meanings'. He reasons that if language learning

is activated by the socio-cultural purpose of schematic extension...then it would seem to follow that a central problem in the teaching of a foreign language lies in the provision of some comparable activating purpose. In other words, we need to identify areas of schematic knowledge which the learners will accept as independently relevant and worth acquiring so that the learning of the language is seen as the necessary means to a desired end. (Widdowson 1990: 103)

It is in this way that learners are given the opportunity to negotiate meaning because a communicative purpose has been 'activated', where this purpose is independent of the use of language for its own sake. It is not only references/symbols that are manipulated, but also broader semantic indices are introduced. And this in fact ties the learning of schematic knowledge back to motive, by convincing learners of the relevancy of their study.

The two renderings of the negotiation of meaning, although complementary, may therefore be said to encompass different levels of communicative processes, one at the interactive level, with the use of utterances designed to clarify intent and fact, and one at the cognitive level. Where one refers to the use of communicative *strategies*, and thus of developing the ability to clarify (initially misunderstood) utterances, messages and facts, the other refers to the general interpretative *process* and the use of language, not for its own sake, but in purposeful contexts. One finds both versions and applications of the negotiation of meaning in communicative language teaching methodology.

### **2.2.2 Features of Communicative Language Teaching in the Classroom**

*Methodological Features and Activities.* Many of the types of activities that take place in the communicative class have already been indirectly referred to. Of the kinds of activities that are attributable to CLT, the most significant and well known activities are generally subsume under so called notional-functional based activities, and the (often loosely applied) concept of tasks.

The origin of the notional-functional syllabus, at least in EFL pedagogy, is often attributed to the work done by Van Ek and Alexander (1975) for the Council of Europe, and commensurately by Wilkins (1976). We have seen how, based on the sociolinguistic perspective of communicative competence, the instrumental features of language were emphasized, referring to how speakers use language to achieve given socio-cultural goals in interaction. Thus speakers require language to express 'abstract concepts such as existence, space, time, quantity, and quality' (Brown 1987: 214), more specific notions concerning the uses of language in given contexts and topics, and the functions of language in such exchanges as inviting, declining, asking, reporting and so on. Bearing these performative and functional requisites in mind, CLT syllabuses aimed for European adults have been developed on the basis of: a) situations in which they might typically find themselves in b) topics they will talk about c) functions they will need d) the notions used in communication, and e) the vocabulary and grammar needed (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 74).

Thompson (1996) writes that CLT is strongly associated with pair work and problem-solving tasks, while Richards and Rodgers write that it is learner-centered and experience-based (Richards and Rodgers 1986). In functional communicative activities in the classroom therefore, learners imagine 'what I would say' situations, practice dialogues, enact role-plays, do conversation practice and discussion activities among others (Brown 1987: 214). Learners are also often presented with problems which they must solve using '*whatever language they have at their disposal*', with the intent being that 'learners should use the language they know in order to get meanings across as effectively as possible' (Littlewood 1981: 20

emphasis in original). Littlewood's examples of problems that learners engaged in pair-work must solve include discovering and sharing missing information, features, or differences from picture cards; following directions on maps; reconstructing story sequences and; processing information by discussing and evaluating facts from fact sheets (Littlewood 1981: 22-37). Other methods used by CLT are simulation and games (e.g. Crookall and Oxford 1990), strategic interaction 'scenarios' (e.g. Di Pietro 1987) and social interaction activities (Littlewood 1981) all of which generally involve learners partaking in face-to-face communication to some degree.

Because many agree that 'foreign language teaching must be concerned with reality' (Littlewood 1981: 95), a widely accepted feature of CLT is that it should engage the learner in 'meaningful and authentic language use' (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 72). While the issue of what 'authentic' language and language use means is hotly debated (e.g. Widdowson 1983 for his reservations of the concept; The issue of authentic text will be discussed in a later chapter), it is often applied to the use of advertisements, newspapers, magazines and other 'realia' intended for target culture audiences. Activities thus often include the analysis of such texts.

Amalgamated to CLT principles and the notional-functional syllabus are task-based activities and approaches, and they share many if not most of the methodological features of those already mentioned. While Kumaravadivelu is right in pointing out that the term *task* has been used indiscriminately, making it therefore difficult to determine a common set of criteria to define it (1993), there are some well-known and cited versions. Thus, for Nunan a task is

a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form' (Nunan 1989:10).

Prabhu, one of the first proponents of task-based approaches, bases his work on premises similar to CLT. Tasks he argues take advantage of:



- i. the learner's desire to meet a challenge
  - ii. the preoccupation with meaning or thinking which such problem-solving necessarily brings about and;
  - iii. the incidental struggle with language-use such activity engenders
- (cited in Brumfit 1984: 102)

Though there does not seem to be a great difference in theoretical perspective and principle, Kumaravadivelu sets about making the distinction between function-based and task-based syllabuses. He argues that while function-based activities are *communicative*, task-based ones are *pedagogic*, the difference being that while communicative activities can continue to be the practice of formal and functional linguistic features in presequenced and preselected paths, with contextualization being an attempt to reveal the purpose of given structures, in task-based activities the principle of the non-predictability of structure-use and non-linearity of L2 development allows learners to 'navigate their own paths and routes to learning' (Kumaravadivelu 1993: 73). It is the difference, in short, between intentional and incidental L2 development respectively, although the degree of overlap between what are considered to be communicative activities and task-based activities leaves one wondering whether the distinction should be made at all.

*The role of the teacher.* It is not only in terms of activities and syllabus that CLT effected alterations of classroom dynamics. A second core feature of the communicative language 'industry' is that the relationship between instructor and learner is seen in a new light. In referring to the shift in teaching method and teacher's role from the Audiolingual Method that preceded CLT, Lee and VanPatten write:

With the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT), the instructor's role changed. The instructor was no longer simply the drill leader but was also charged with providing students opportunities for communication, that is, using the language to interpret and express real-life messages (Lee and VanPatten 1990: 8).

In these and similar terms quite an inventory of teachers' roles have been put forward. Richards and Rodgers (1986) for example, describe the teacher as needs analyst, as counselor and as group process manager. Teachers as needs analysts conduct surveys and hold one-on-one interviews among other means, so that they can plan lessons in response to them. As counselors teachers are expected to guide communicative attempts of learners with paraphrasing, confirmation and feedback, and as group process managers they are responsible for organizing the 'classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 78), and in these activities teachers are supposed to monitor, encourage and suppress 'the inclination to supply gaps in lexis, grammar, and strategy but [note] such gaps for later commentary' (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 78).

Other terms and metaphors for teacher roles include teachers as facilitators, participants and observers (Breen and Candlin 1980), co-learners (Jacobs and Farrell 2001), and researchers (Van Lier 1996). Generally, while some consider that teacher roles have changed to the extent that teacher authority and professionalism have been undermined and eroded, the respecification of teacher roles has entailed a movement away from teacher as singular source of information and knowledge standing at the head of the class, to a position of guidance and encouragement of learners efforts with and among each other as well as the instructor. This has as much to do with the nature of activities in that they have been designed to be learner-centered as it does with issues of authority, control and power which have come to the fore in CLT (Nunan 1989).

### **2.3 The Critique of CLT**

While it has enjoyed almost universally enthusiastic reception, the communicative approach has increasingly been a target of criticism, albeit for various and even conflicting reasons. Indeed, the fact that scholars argue that it should be seen as an approach, not a method (e.g. Richards and Rodgers 1986) suggests that communicative language teaching is a broadly conceived perspective, rather than a

range of specifically applied procedures. Paradoxically, this makes CLT both an easy target, and at the same time difficult to critique. On the one hand it's often loosely-bound range of activities and methods imply to many a lack of rigor or direction. On the other hand it encompasses such a wide-reaching theoretical and applied area that it would be no exaggeration to say that elements of CLT are in virtually all language teaching syllabuses and methods, meaning that any critique can, in some ways place one in the position of critiquing the whole field of foreign language pedagogy *per se*, or of being susceptible to counter-arguments that one's criticisms have overlooked features which would render them irrelevant. At any rate, many important issues have been raised by scholars – even those such as Widdowson who are associated with the approach - that merit acknowledgment.

Of its failings in general, Richards and Rodgers (1986) note that CLT is relatively weak in any learning theory that can be used to support it. Adding this to its ultimately imprecise definition, Crookall and Oxford provide perhaps the neatest summary as to what problems CLT faces. In terms of activities they write that 'communicative language teaching is sometimes more ideal than a reality, even for teachers who are aware of communication as a major goal. And even when teachers have accepted the general idea of communicative language instruction, they do not always know what it is or how to implement it' (Crookall and Oxford 1990: 12).

Perhaps the heaviest criticism directed at CLT has been reserved for its conceptualization of communication (and thus its subsequent application), with Widdowson for example bluntly asserting that it has a 'highly impoverished conceptualization of communication' (Widdowson 1990: 22). In a similar vein, some suggest that its approach reveals a reductive view of the nature of communicative interaction among social actors (e.g. Hall 1995; Holliday 1999).

One reason for this is that the instrumental perspective of language, giving rise to the theoretical debate concerning the privileging of function over (traditional) form, or even discussions as to their relationship, has resulted in a neglect of other salient

features of communication. Concerned with the neglect of learner identity, Morgan writes:

Any time function is identified through form and form through function, there is the potential to overlook or simplify complex social and ideological processes that shape the experience of identity but are not directly encoded or materially evident in texts. And in the classroom there is the attendant danger of objectifying a singular form/function relationship and using it normatively when instructing or evaluating students (Morgan 1997: 436).

Thus, there is a tendency to want to treat communication in the same manner as the structural, linguistic approach, in that communicative contexts are reduced in their variability, and are seen as idealized versions with singular functional qualities, rather than interpretable ones. This can be attributed, argue some, to the context-based approaches as manifested in Hymes' 'ethnography of speaking' and Halliday's functional approach. Of these Hall writes that they:

fall short in two significant ways: first, they fail to consider the differentially weighted potential which the meanings of the resources themselves have in being open to possible modification or transformation by an individual at any particular moment of use; and second, they fail to consider that individuals are differentially weighted in their potential to use, modify, or transform the resources. In other words, individual uses (or non-uses) of the linguistic resources typically associated with particular contexts are influenced by more than just the setting, the immediate goals, the moves called for in reaching those goals, the roles we play within these contexts, and our individual levels of competence to do so. Additionally, the meanings of the linguistic resources typical of any context are influenced by more than the intention of any one individual at a particular bounded moment of time (Hall 1995: 206-7).

Kramsch too criticizes oversimplified views of language as a functional tool, and questions the notion of language function: 'mapping different functions onto different levels reinforces the all-too-pervasive belief in linear, cumulative language learning that has created false expectations and engendered disillusion in the past' (Kramsch 1986: 367).

The notion of the negotiation of meaning can also be seen to present myopic visions of communication. While negotiation as a clarification strategy for reducing ambiguity is of course very common in everyday conversation, negotiation in CLT

still does not consider meaning to be problematic per se: meaning is transcendent and actually quite transparently 'there' once it is unlocked in the process of resolving problems of reception.

Communicative competence is also a problematic and disputed concept (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell 1991: 143). It is acknowledged as a 'complex and unstable concept' that is 'frequently interpreted to mean simply the ability to produce spoken utterances which are marked for illocutionary function' (Widdowson 1990: 39). Byram too notes its restricted interpretation and writes that 'communicative competence is too frequently interpreted - especially in beginners and intermediate stages - as a capacity to fit appropriate language to specific transaction' (Byram 1991b: 18). In other words, competence has been reduced to a highly localized functional ability, implying more rule-driven, 'how to' injunctions applied to supposedly independent contexts, as opposed to a general ability to interact.

Challenging Wilkins (1976) contention that notional-functional syllabuses can produce communicative competence, Widdowson argues that 'no syllabus, however conceived and designed, can *produce* communicative competence. A syllabus is simply an inert specification.' (Widdowson 1990: 39, emphasis in original) The problems inherent in functional syllabuses are that 'it turns out that learners do not very readily infer knowledge of the language system from their communicative activities... so quite often the situation arises where learners acquire a fairly patchy and imperfect repertoire of performance which is not supported by an underlying [linguistic/systemic] competence' (Widdowson 1990: 161).

While Hymes' model of communicative competence arose out of the critique of the notion of the Chomskian 'ideal' speaker and her linguistic competence, researchers have now turned to problematizing the notion of the 'native' speaker upon which the model of communicative competence is based (for example, Allwright 1984; Alptekin 2002; Kramsch 1998b). Like the ideal speaker, or for that matter the

native language, the native speaker does not exist independently of theoretical constructs and abstractions, which moreover are politically motivated (Kramsch 1998b). And if the notion of native speaker can be questioned, then the communicative competence he or she is supposed to possess no longer has much ground to stand on.

Another significant objection concerns the content/method divide that has come to the fore in the communicative approach. Despite the *professed* change in perspective from structural to methodological interests, some argue that CLT in many cases does not so much represent a revolution at all, and instead 'traditional procedures are not rejected but are reinterpreted and extended' (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 82). Consistent with this is the observation that the content/method dichotomy thus posed in no way implies any exclusivity, that it is entirely possible to have communicative methodology in 'the realization of a structural syllabus' (Kumaravadivelu 1993: 72). On another level, Foley argues that, after all, it is pedagogic content that is intended to harmonize with course rather than personal objectives, and that consequently learners are 'object-regulated' (Foley 1991: 68). In this assessment it is no longer even methodological perspective which drives procedures, but the more or less non-negotiable content that must be covered, as predetermined by course designers.

All of the theoretical weaknesses outlined in terms of content/methodology, or form/function dichotomies have an upshot in the classroom and its practices. James writes that to date CLT 'has failed to elaborate a convincing and consistent paradigm, and is forced to rely and base itself on a 'bag of tricks'...which qualify by not offending the ethos of the movement' (James 1983: 110). Many argue that the adoption of notional-functional syllabuses based on reductive views of communication, as well as lack of impetus to change content, has represented nothing more than the swapping of lists that 'are now functionally rather than formally defined' (Widdowson 1990: 40). Brown notes that the notional syllabus continues to present language as an 'inventory of units' (Brown 1987: 215, citing

Widdowson 1978b). This is a common criticism. Foley for example returns to the issue of the learner as individual, and targets the neglect of the learner's needs, as well as the process which legitimized new methods and content:

In the Functional/Notional approach the grammatically organized teaching procedures were simply superseded by a list of functions based very often on a hypothetical needs analysis which provided the learner with parts of a system in some predetermined order, devised by a descriptive linguist, without reference to the learner as an individual (Foley 1991: 69).

Widdowson writes:

Functions tend to dominate the scene with notions appearing in a separate subplot in a relatively minor role. As to the functions themselves, they are deprived of their pragmatic identity and cast in a role in which they resemble the grammatical units that they replace (Widdowson 1990: 42).

Berns also argues that many versions of functional-notional approach are nothing more 'than an overlay of new terms on old concepts' (Berns 1990: 87) and even questions whether some interpretations of functional-notional teaching could rightly be considered communicative at all, in that they are more concerned with '*practicing* communication than with engaging learners in communication itself' (Berns 1990: 87 emphasis in original).

There are those who challenge CLT on the grounds that its emphasis on function overlooks and neglects the importance of accuracy (Cook 1997). Although Thompson (1996) defends CLT against this common criticism and 'misconception', he is also aware of many of the criticisms to which it is genuinely susceptible. For example, in many cases tasks designed under the CLT rubric are actually thin disguises of traditional form-focused activities and in many CLT textbooks 'it is immediately noticeable that the content of what is said by the learners is controlled at every point by the book' (Thompson 1996: 13), therefore undermining any notion that learners' communicative needs are being catered to, or that any 'discovery' is being encouraged.

While scholars such as Richards and Rodgers raise practical issues concerning the communicative approach, such as to which learner-levels it can be applied, whether it is equally applicable in FL and SL contexts, how suitable it is for non-native teachers, and how it is to be adopted in contexts where grammar is still the focus of evaluation (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 83), others raise the level of abstraction and see the practical application of the communicative approach as a serious blight on any real potential for learners to become participants in cross-cultural communication, and damn the 'trivialization' of language learning:

Unfortunately, with the spread of communicative language teaching, the belief grew up that as long as a message was passed from A to B, learning could take place. This led to an emphasis on any activity that would encourage one student to pass some form of message to another. These "interactive activities" and games came to dominate the language classroom and led to the ever-increasing trivialization of language learning and learners...Indeed, as long as language teaching continues to trivialize itself, refusing to explore the cultural and political aspects of language learning, it will have more to do with assimilation than with any notion of empowerment' (Pennycook, 1990: 13)

### ***2.3.1 Post-Method and Post-Communicative Language Teaching***

Perhaps because CLT has resulted in the 'perennial concern to test different 'methods' to see which one is best, that is, most efficient' (Ferguson and Huebner, 1991: 8), some researchers have begun to look for approaches which transcend this pattern. Likewise seeing various methods as cycles of fashion, Kumaravadivelu (1994) calls for an awareness in L2 pedagogy 'that as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation' (Kumaravadivelu 1994: 28). He thus aims to instigate a shift to the approach in FLT, suggesting a 'postmethod condition' which has three main characteristics: an 'alternative to method, rather than an alternative method' (Kumaravadivelu 1994: 29), teacher autonomy, and



principled pragmatics in which teachers develop a 'sense of plausibility' about what they do. With these three characteristics Kumaravadivelu touches on issues concerning methodological accountability and more localized approaches to teaching foreign languages, as opposed to wholesale approaches that are often inapplicable or irrelevant in specific pedagogic conditions.

Even as long ago as 1988 Byram wrote of 'post-communicative language teaching' (Byram 1988a). Rather than focusing on language *per se*, he stresses the learner's involvement in the communicative act and argues that 'for successful communication to take place participants must be involved in what they are saying, which implies a more complex notion of communication than exchange of information' (Byram 1988a: 4). To this end, Byram criticizes the 'inconsequential content or frivolous debasement of serious subjects' (Byram 1988a: 4, citing Quinn 1985), implying that learner involvement is dependent on choice of topic. This article also marks a starting point to Byram's emphasis on cultural awareness and here he argues that 'the aim [of language learning and teaching] should be socio-cultural competence in which language is learnt in context' (1988a: 4), even if he leaves the complex notion of *context* unexplored.

However, no real successor to CLT has emerged, and if one agrees with Crookall and Oxford that 'encouraging communication among students in the classroom requires a rather radical shift in roles and classroom organization' (Crookall and Oxford 1990: 13), then the criticisms outlined here might suggest that this radical shift has as yet not occurred either, even if CLT is considered a revolution, and that other avenues, theories, and approaches need to be considered. Moreover, with Byram's call for cultural awareness and the aim to develop socio-cultural competence set in the context of communicative language teaching, a clear association between CLT and the study of culture is made apparent.

## **2.4 Summary and Discussion: Toward Culture**

There were four fundamental shifts in Foreign Language Teaching that caused the demise of 'traditional' structural approaches, such as grammar-translation and the audio-lingual method, and the ascendancy of the communicative approach. There was a) a shift in emphasis from linguistic structure to an abiding interest in instrumental language use; b) a focus on speaking and communicative competence as a pedagogic goal; c) a reconsideration of method that favored interactive and problem-solving activities, and; d) a change in perspective as to how instructors manage and conduct classes.

While CLT continues to be a dominant pedagogical paradigm with no principled successor, significant criticisms have been proffered to outline its failings. Most of these criticisms can be summarized as reactions to the sterile view of communication that it presents which results in methods that emphasize function at the expense of other important features and uses of language. In addition, as much as CLT continues to posit itself as concentrating on communication, communicative competence and fluency, many argue that nothing has really changed in terms of what the fundamental object and goal of a language course is. The focus, often enough, is a 'language' described by linguists, which is therefore bound by a linguistic paradigm. To counteract this tendency scholars have stressed the importance of such notions as social context and relations, learner identity and culture among others, though the question remains as to how successfully.

### **2.4.1 Critical Perspective Towards CLT in this Thesis**

As already noted, Communicative Language Teaching is not the main subject of this thesis, and as such will not form the bulk of the discussion. Yet it will be ever present in the background because it is the only relatively principled approach to language teaching which, with its stress on communication and context, is related to, and can be seen as a philosophical precursor to the more recent interests with regard to culture. Thus, although its dominance alone could justify an examination

and critique as to how its methodologies have approached the inclusion of sociocultural dimensions of language in pedagogical settings, this thesis echoes and furthers the concerns of those who question methodologies that claim to (re)present reality or the reality of communication, among them such scholars as Celce-Murcia et al (1991), Morgan (1997); Norton Peirce (1995; 1997); Cook (1997), and Widdowson (1978; 1990).

As indicated in the opening chapter, one of the aims of this study is to investigate the methods of L2 pedagogy from the perspective that meaning (and with it knowledge) is a process of embodied, politicized history that cannot be abstracted from the sites of its production without undergoing inevitable transformations. When the issue is that of analyzing, learning, and studying a foreign language, especially formally, the stakes are multiplied, since on the one hand the target language is often 'dislocated' from its conditions of production, and on the other hand, learners have only their own meaning-making schemas with which to compare it. Therefore, the instrumental view of language is also reductive in that the 'language-as-tool' metaphor presents an overly simplistic conception of languages because they consider them no more than mirrors of each other. Yet when the social theorist Calhoun writes: 'Translation adequate to comparative analysis requires an interpretation of a whole organization of activity, not just the matching of vocabulary' (Calhoun 1995: 59), this applies as equally to the study of language in the L2 classroom as it does to the sociologist. And Byram echoes this by frequently arguing that 'Even if teachers continue to encourage cultural insight despite the lack of assessment credit for this, the practical communication view of language encourages pupils to think that the foreign language is simply a coded version of [their own native language], with the same meanings and connotations, which happens to be spoken by people living across the sea from us and having strange customs and eating habits' (Byram 1988a: 3).

When Littlewood (1981) insists that language teaching should be concerned with reality we must therefore prick our ears. If we can assume that what he means is

that reality is what is 'out in the streets', and that he is suggesting it can be brought into the (the 'reality' of the) classroom, it is crucial that we ask not only how this is possible, but 'who is to make this possible?' and 'on what grounds can they assert that what is being presented *is* the reality out in the streets?' Moreover, while CLT rightly acknowledges that viewing language as communication is vital to the proper understanding of language, it seems that relatively little effort has been undertaken to explore what this really means and entails for the learner. What does it mean to communicate as a person in various social situations? What does it mean to mean? What is so-called 'effective' language acquisition based on analysis of communication?

The functional approach can therefore be said not only to objectify language – a major criticism it has applied to structural approaches – but to objectify communication itself. With this in mind, this project will critically examine the types of methods and practices the Communicative Approach employs, with the consideration that while classifying contexts in which instrumental language is evident is not in itself a necessarily misguided practice, the attempt to do this in order to present these classifications as natural, transparent or independent of larger conditions in which they are but productions ought to be questioned. Secondly, to follow the line of this argument, a position which acknowledges that social practice is not objectifiable can be used to support and reinforce the call to conceptualize environments in which learners have access to the types of schema which are not formally reduced, manipulated, edited or *chosen* on behalf of the students while at the same time providing access to relevant feedback, clarification and awareness-raising.

These points then, refer to a perspective that emphasizes that knowledge – and this includes knowledge of language – is grounded in social experience. If this is indeed the case then it seems hardly appropriate to decide what sort of experience the individual is going to have. The aim therefore, is to examine communicative language teaching from a perspective that, in taking account of the complexity of its

subject, namely culture and language, does not reduce the subject by hypostatizing, reducing and objectifying it. That is, the aim is not to invent and add another method to the CLT banner. Rather, to appropriate McGuigan, the aim is to 'identify and interrogate urgent issues of [second language methodology] from the point of view of an emancipatory knowledge interest' (McGuigan 1996: 177).

To recap, the focus will be on the theory and the attendant methodologies of Communicative Language Teaching that this project has identified as problematic on two levels. First, CLT and its offshoot methodologies have objectified and abstracted the subject of culture and social practice, resulting in practices which take comparatively little account of the nature of culture *per se*. Second, this objectification is in turn largely caused by the (self-imposed) constraints of a model of economy which has as its goal quantifiable knowledge of language, rather than a qualitative understanding of language use in social environments.

In addition to the questions that have already been asked in chapter one, the 'anchoring' of the study of culture to communicative language teaching now entails further considerations regarding it, including:

1. How can methodologies claim to present reality, when the conditions and environment of the classroom in no way replicate the practices it wants to study, and, presumably, attain understanding of?
2. Is CLT's theoretical formulation of language as social practice appropriate and comprehensive? Has CLT neglected certain aspects of socially situated language, which serve to limit the possibility of attaining the goals it sets itself? What are 'meaningful units', what is meant by the expression 'shared knowledge' of which Littlewood (1981: 65) speaks? These two expressions seem to be perhaps inadvertently revealing a view that sees language and meaning as transparent, objective and static. Littlewood implies that knowledge of language, which seems to come in handily packaged units of meaning, comes prior to a 'shared' 'cultural' 'knowledge' (all of which need scare quotes to

acknowledge the essential ambiguity and difficulty of these terms). Is this the case? What takes place – socially and psychologically – in real-life, culturally shared messages? Can we ultimately know?

3. What are the goals that the CLT approach hopes to attain? Do these goals actually match the theoretical objectives? Are these goals met, or has CLT failed in the same manner as it accused its predecessors, namely by teaching the same thing in a new way? Does CLT end up trying to teach knowledge of language as opposed to knowledge of language use, which are arguably distinctly different abilities?
4. With this distinction in mind, what are Competence and Performance, and according to which criteria is Communicative Proficiency determined? Are these criteria related to the types of knowledge of that socially situated speakers and hearers employ? If fluency is the goal, how is the success of the goal determined? On what grounds is it possible to demand that a learner's competence be objectively measured?
5. If CLT and related methodologies claim to be using reality as a means to teach language, how does it account for all the variables and ambiguities that reality presents us with?
6. Has the instructor's role in fact changed? And does the classroom provide opportunities for genuine communication?

Attempts to address these questions will arise in the course of the following chapters, and a more concentrated critique of the methods CLT uses, based on the principles that will be developed, will be offered in chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Review: Culture in Foreign Language Pedagogy**

From communicative language teaching, one possible step to expand the characteristics and features that are thought to comprise communication is to consider culture. Although Buttjes (1991: 11) notes that the 'intercultural debate in language teaching expanded in scope and volume during the 1980s', perhaps largely as a result of the ascendance of CLT, the subject of culture has generally received only sporadic attention throughout twentieth century foreign language pedagogy. It has already been noted that a concerted discipline-level theory, approach or syllabus is far from being widely applied or frankly, even debated. Even the emphasis on communicative competence has tended to proceed largely in ignorance of cultural features of communication that, for example, give rise to notions of appropriate communicative behavior.

It is becoming possible however to consider a relatively small number of FLT researchers as being part of a specialized field, distinct from 'mainstream', pedagogical discussions concerning language, and who have made the issues surrounding the study of culture, and language as a cultural artifact, their primary consideration. One of the most noted of these academics, Claire Kramsch, echoes the concern regarding the general disregard of culture in relation to appropriate communicative behavior:

It is generally recognised that there is more to the successful exchange of meanings than knowledge of forms and structures and even to their appropriate use – or rather, that everything revolves around what one means by 'appropriate

use'. Foreign language educators...tend to lump this surplus of meanings under the category of 'culture' (Kramsch 1991: 217).

This assessment may of course be taken in support of the recognition that culture is an important element in 'all-round' communicative ability. But the fact that culture is seen as a 'surplus' – Bentahila and Davies (1989: 100) likewise write that culture is often treated as an 'optional supplement' – is telling in that it has clearly not received the critical attention it warrants. It suggests that it is a peripheral concern, and that scholars who do engage in its analysis are doing only peripheral, if not indulgent work.

This chapter will review the work of these scholars, and will include their main theoretical discussions, treatments and applications of culture, as well as the methods, or models they have offered. It will begin with a general range of definitions of culture in language teaching that have been considered. Following this, there will be a review of the various theories, interests and issues regarding learning culture and acculturation, as discussed in FLT and SLA. The third section will provide an outline of procedures and practices of teaching culture in the class. While, prior to the summary, there will be a discussion as to critiques of current approaches of CIFLL.

### **3.1 Defining and Perceiving Culture**

An initial problem perhaps, is that upon first consideration 'culture' seems to suggest a relatively unambiguous concept, and it is therefore a concept the definition of which often remains implied, as something that everybody 'kind of knows what it means'. Yet among scholars who invest closer consideration into understanding culture and its impact in social life, its definition is an important concern as they attempt to outline their own projects. This then leads to so many definitions that an exhaustive outline would be unduly time-consuming, tedious, and unfruitful. Indeed, as long ago as the 1950s Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) famously reviewed more than 150 definitions of culture in the human sciences. No wonder then that Scollon and Scollon rightly concede 'the word "culture" often



brings up more problems than it solves' (Scollon and Scollon 1995: 125). Seelye is a little more jaded:

I know of no way better to ensure having nothing productive happen than for a language department to begin its approach to culture by a theoretical concern for defining the term. (Seelye 1978, cited in Robinson 1988: 7)

The point here then is not to provide an extensive list of researchers' definitions, nor in fact to prefer or offer one. For one, critics inevitably contend that a proposed definition is reductive (Sarangi 1994). Secondly, this can arguably lead to a situation in which the ontology or theory of culture is an assumed given, thereby skirting important issues prior to any research undertaken. As Brown puts it 'a definition is really a condensed version of a theory, and a theory is simply – or not so simply – an extended definition' (Brown 1987: 3), and this is why a definition (and therefore theory) can only come later, if at all.

There is a distinction however, between definitions and broader perspectives, and in this section these will be outlined in order to provide an orientation as to how culture is viewed among scholars who hope to raise its status in foreign language pedagogy. Atkinson (1999) for example surveys the treatments and definitions of culture as published in TESOL Quarterly over the past fifteen years<sup>1</sup>. Initially arguing that the trend has been to ignore culture<sup>2</sup>, he finds only ten articles which explicitly mention the culture in the title. He goes on to divide them into three main categories: six articles employ a 'received' view of culture – that is, as geographically divided, homogenous entities; two articles 'express some reservation' (Atkinson 1999: 627) of received definitions, and two articles challenge the notion of culture as a useful concept at all, and which substitute postmodern interests, such as subjectivity and identity, in its place.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, the fact that Atkinson surveys only one journal left him open to criticisms by Siegal (2000) and Sparrow (2000), for confining his discussion and thereby creating a false impression.

<sup>2</sup> Atkinson speculates that it is either because of generally received and uncritically accepted uses of the term, or even because 'the standard notion of culture has fallen into such disrepute in recent years that TESOL practitioners have gradually come to eschew it largely or altogether' (Atkinson 1999: 625).

Atkinson then goes on to discuss some of the issues and debates that have been held in recent years, most of which centre on establishing the notion of culture as 'fluid, ever-changing, and nondeterministic' (Atkinson 1999: 630), and oppose previous essentializing practices and agendas. After a brief invocation of critical and anthropological treatments of the culture concept, from which he synthesizes Giddens's (1979) structuration theory with sociocognitive views of culture to establish a 'middle-ground' approach, whereby culture is 'constantly reconstrued and reconstructed in the agentive activities of human beings, although not in a wholly unconstrained way' (Atkinson 1999: 640), Atkinson concludes that as researchers and teachers we must aim for a 'well-rounded understanding of culture' (Atkinson 1999: 641), rather than abandon its use as a research object altogether. He thereby proposes six principles for understanding the notion of culture: all humans are individuals; individuality is cultural; 'social group memberships and identity are multiple, contradictory, and dynamic' (Atkinson 1999: 643); membership is consequential; methods that aim to study cultural knowledge and behavior are 'unlikely to fit a positivist paradigm' (Atkinson 1999: 646), and; language and culture learning and teaching 'are mutually implicated, but culture is multiple and complex' (Atkinson 1999: 647)

From a more randomly chosen collection of statements about culture, Damen (1987) identifies eight general perspectives. They include perspectives which: a) emphasize functions within culture that causes a sense of cohesion; b) consider a 'classic anthropological' definition that refers to a unifying concept as a conglomeration of variables that include among others, beliefs, values, artifacts, habits; c) consider the similarity of perception; d) emphasize communication to varying degrees, and; e) those which focus on symbolism (Damen 1987: 73-74). Rather than evaluate the merits of any particular orientation, Damen here concludes that 'there are no simple neat definitions to tuck away and bring out for inspection when needed. We are locked into a state of permanent definitional ambiguity – a mixed blessing.' (Damen 1987: 75)

Not unsurprisingly, one of the most common reasons authors look towards anthropology (including linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics) is to borrow definitions of culture. Scholars cited in recent years include Clifford (e.g. 1986), Geertz (e.g. 1973), Goffman (e.g. 1969) and Hall (e.g. 1977), and indeed their work will be encountered in coming chapters here also. But in contrast to definitions proffered by these academics at an individual level (who at any rate are representatives of schools of thought), a more informative and broader understanding is obtained by considering general theoretical approaches from anthropology. This is what Robinson (1988), for example, does by providing a summary of four main theoretical definitions, behaviorist, functionalist, cognitive and symbolic. They are summarized thus:

1. **behaviorist:** culture as consisting of observable behaviours, including traditions, habits and customs. Leads to descriptions of behaviour. In the language classroom 'this concept of culture often leads to study of discrete practices or institutions'
2. **functionalist:** like the behaviorist an emphasis on behaviours, though here they are seen in the light of causative and underlying rules and reasons. These rules and reasons need to be inferred from observed behaviours. The dominant question therefore is 'why?' people behave in the ways observed.
3. **cognitive:** where culture is the process of mentally organising, categorizing and interpreting material input. From this perspective 'culture is like a computer program,' or a shared model for perceiving. In learning and studying a foreign culture, methods like ethnography try to get 'an inside [or insider's] point of view'
4. **symbolic:** culture as a system of symbols and meanings, derived from cognitive processing. That is, meaning arises from, and is seen as a result or product of, the dialectic process between experience and reality. Past experience gives rise to symbols and meanings, which in turn influence subsequent interpretations, meanings, experiences and so on. In the FL class this involves aiming toward a synthesis between a 'learner's home culture, the target cultural input and the learner as an individual' (Robinson 1988: 8-12)

Robinson notes that the 'current trend of second language educators is to view culture from behaviorist and/or functionalist perspectives' (Robinson 1988: 8),

though in recent years there has been some movement away from these perspectives, and towards more cognitive and symbolic perspectives<sup>3</sup>.

Kramsch is one scholar who aims to infuse foreign language pedagogy with the meaningful and therefore symbolic perspective of culture. She asks rhetorically: 'given that we want to teach language in such a way that learners are initiated into its social and cultural meanings, how many of these meanings must be made explicit, how many can be understood implicitly?' (Kramsch 1993: 9). In order to understand how 'common ways of viewing the world' (Kramsch 1998a: 6) and values, beliefs, and assumptions arise, Kramsch for much of her work (e.g. 1993; 1995; 1998a; 2000) focuses on two processes of meaning-making – contextualization and dialogicality, and aims to make cultural context a core feature of language teaching (Kramsch 1993: 13). She also emphasizes the tensions and struggles within cultures, and the negotiated character of meaning, and cultural production. Aware of both material and ideological perspectives of culture, the historical influence on the construction of speech and discourse communities, and the dynamics of power and hegemonic effects of dominant communities, culture for Kramsch is 'facts and meanings' (Kramsch 1993: 24), a force that liberates people 'from oblivion, anonymity, and the randomness of nature' and constrains them by 'imposing on them a structure and principles of selection' (Kramsch 1998a: 6); it is a 'product of socially and historically situated discourse communities... created and shaped by language' (Kramsch 1998a: 10). Discourse communities are both real and 'imagined' as symbolic forces that create the sense of communal identity. And, 'because cultures are fundamentally heterogeneous and changing, they are a constant site of struggle for recognition and legitimation' (Kramsch 1998a: 10).

For Kramsch struggle is omnipresent and operates both at synchronic and diachronic levels, between and across discourses and individuals. That is, for both

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, by 1999 Wells writes of a 'cognitive revolution' in language learning and teaching that has challenged empirical perspectives, though he likewise notes that despite this 'the conceptualization of learning and teaching has remained largely unchanged' (Wells 1999: 138).

learner and 'native' (a construct she critiques and largely dismisses, cf. 1998b) meanings operate at personal, shared local, and cultural levels, and 'there is a struggle for control between the individual and social voices' (1993: 49). Kramsch hopes to exploit this struggle as both an analytical method and a pedagogical approach where learners can create personal meanings at the interchange between home and the target cultures.

Byram (and colleagues) is another of the most dominant and prolific voices in culture-in-FL-studies, and he has published extensively from the British/European context. He can be seen as adhering to a cognitive perspective, made evident by frequent appeals to, for example, 'systems of perception and interpretation' which are 'unconscious and non-verbalised' (Byram and Cain 1998: 35). Like Kramsch, he views the production of meaning and context as central considerations. Unlike Kramsch however, Byram tends to stress the sharedness of, more than the struggle over, cultural meanings: 'actions acquire their meaning from the norms or constitutive rules which are *recognised and agreed by all* and which, independently of individuals, are part of social reality' (Byram 1989: 84, emphasis added).

Just what the notion of culture encompasses in terms of magnitude is also cause for reflection. After all, the idea that cultures are comprised of large groups of people and their supposed commonality in no way describes how such a group is to be rounded up, as it were, and some see this is an important problem that needs addressing. For Holliday 'the learning of culture in language education [has] been placed around 'large' ethnic, national and international cultural differences' (Holliday 1999: 237) and he therefore proposes an alternative notion of 'small' culture as an attempt to 'liberate "culture" from notions of ethnicity and nation' (Holliday 1999: 237). For Holliday (1999: 247) small cultures are 'any social grouping from a neighbourhood to a work group'.

Another approach does not oppose small and large cultures, but sees (large) culture as affecting and filtering down through various settings. For example, in a research

report on the culturally influenced behaviors in cross-cultural lectures (i.e. foreign lecturers and native learners), Flowerdew and Miller (1995) distinguish and argue for an increased awareness of four different levels of culture: ethnic, local, academic, and disciplinary. These refer, respectively, to 'social-psychological features' and what would normally be thought of as culture *per se*; particular contexts and material conditions within the broader cultural referent (e.g. regional differences); perceptions towards particular institutional discourses (in this case academia), and; the culture of particular disciplines and how they are structured, concepts and terminology, and so on. However, Flowerdew and Miller do not in fact provide any definition of culture, nor is it their aim to analyze it in any significant ways. (Indeed, Atkinson notes them as conforming to a received view of culture as being static, homogenous and unproblematic. [Atkinson 1999: 628])

Among specialists then, a general consensus has in recent years emerged as to what culture is. Scholars dedicated to the topic of culture teaching and learning are generally unified in acknowledging culture as heterogeneous and multidimensional. They see culture as shared, meaningful, normative, behavioral and cognitive, but also a site of struggle tension and change. It is a concept or construct wrought with definitional difficulties, but one nonetheless necessary to keep. It consists of large national boundaries, but also smaller groups and individuals in dialectical relationships with it. It is the basis and foundation of all human (inter)action and perception. It is both material and ideological. And it is, summarily,

any of the customs, worldview, language, kinship system, social organization, and other taken-for-granted day-to-day practices of a people which set that group apart as a distinctive group (Scollon and Scollon 1995: 126).

### **3.2 Learning Culture: Acculturation**

Although SLA is a well-established discipline that can draw on a large corpus, one cannot suggest that there is any discipline devoted to SCA (i.e. second culture acquisition). This is also reflected in the fact that while researchers have at least the

luxury of debating the relevance of SLA to FLL (see for example the collection of papers edited by VanPatten and Lee 1990), no such parallels can be drawn between SCA and FLL. Of minimal research that does exist, it is 'more interested in attitudinal issues relating to learners' development of tolerance and understanding of other cultures' (Lantolf 1999: 28). Robinson (1991: 115) too notes that we 'have not looked at what it is that is acquired in the name of culture learning, how culture is acquired and modified, and by what processes'. Even in sociolinguistics, notes Young, 'no coherent theory of the sociolinguistics of second language acquisition has been advanced so far' (Young 1999: 117)<sup>4</sup>. Add to this VanPatten's admission that SLA 'does not have answers to the fundamental questions of non-primary language acquisition [and that] how and why people acquire languages is a question which is still unanswered and will probably go unanswered for some time' (VanPatten 1990: 19) and it is clear that our knowledge of the epistemological processes of language and culture learning are shaky at best.

It is also difficult to separate research on (first and second) language acquisition, cultural acquisition, and even learning *per se*, as they are all so fundamentally intertwined. This is perhaps why much of the literature on CIFLL makes a leap from developing a perspective on culture to outlining classroom procedures and goals, without clarifying any epistemological positions supporting them, assuming perhaps that the processes of language and culture learning fall under one and the same rubric. However, SLA is concerned with its delimited and self-defined object of language (as *langue*). Thus, when acquisition is considered, it tends to refer to the process of acquiring linguistic structures, or (much less frequently) to first culture acquisition only, so that in texts that consider conditions for language learning (e.g. Brown 1987; Spolsky 1989), the social context for *language* learning is considered, but the social context for *social* learning is not!

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<sup>4</sup> Not everyone feels that SLA should have a single theory. Block (1996) for example, convincingly argues in favour of multiple theories in SLA.

A number of terms are invoked when discussing culture learning. Common distinctions include *enculturation* as learning, or being indoctrinated into, one's first culture, and *acculturation* as the process of 'dealing with new ways and systems of beliefs and patterns of an unfamiliar cultural group' (Damen 1987: 140) or of 'adaptation in varying degree to new cultural patterns' (Damen 1987: 218). Damen is careful to add that in contrast to earlier conceptions of acculturation, where immigrants (she writes from North American background) were expected to *replace* old for new cultures, acculturation should be thought of as a 'series of processes' (Damen 1987: 140). *Assimilation*, on the other hand, does refer to 'complete acculturation' and the adoption of foreign culture characteristics. As always, these definitions are not necessarily water-tight or universally applicable: could one still consider, for example, the contexts in which learners are not directly confronted with 'new cultural patterns' as acculturation? How should one consider conditions in which children are enculturated into two cultural patterns simultaneously? Nonetheless, the terms are sufficiently clear to enable general orientation.

Because enculturation can be discussed in light of learning theory in general, that is, because learning one's first culture can be seen in the light of 'learning to be' (and even therefore, 'learning to learn'), the discussion of these fundamental epistemological principles will be discussed in a later chapter, and the following sections can be devoted to theories and perspectives that have aimed to understand the process of acculturation.

SLA research considers an array of factors which influence second language acquisition, including social, affective, personality, cognitive, biological, aptitude, personal, input and instructional factors (see Schumann 1986 for an elaboration of this taxonomy). While no doubt all of these can be considered in terms of learning another culture as well as language, scholars have concentrated on social, affective and to some degree personality factors. Of models that have attempted to outline the factors and variables that enhance or hinder C2 learning the one posited by



Schumann (1978; 1986) is, as Norton suggests, the most influential in SLA (Norton 1998: 12). Schumann defines acculturation as the 'social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language group', and he argues that an amalgam of social and affective variables cause target language (TL) acquisition (Schumann 1986: 379). Schumann's research is based on the adult immigrant experience and therefore focuses on degrees of direct contact between second language and target language groups. It thus has limitations in terms of its applicability to other learning contexts, notably, of course, those in which learner's have no contact with C2 pattern. Indeed, Schumann deliberately abstains from making proposals concerning language teaching (1986: 385). Nonetheless, an outline of the factors Schumann identifies is worthwhile.

### ***3.2.1 Social Factors of Acculturation***

Schumann (1986) lists seven main factors that affect acculturation:

- a) Dominance patterns:* referring to the degree of subordination and dominance of second language groups in relation to target language groups.
- b) 'Integration strategies:'* whereby the degree of *assimilation* - adopting target culture values lifestyle etc.; *preservation* - of home cultural values; and *adaptation* - adapting new cultural conditions and former lifestyle etc. directly affect target language acquisition.
- c) Enclosure:* referring to how much language learning and target language groups share social constructs such as churches, recreational facilities, schools, clubs professions: when shared, enclosure is low, and when such institutions are not shared, enclosure is high.
- d) Cohesiveness and size of immigrant group.*
- e) Congruence between the two cultures.*
- f) Attitudes of each group toward the other.*
- g) Intended length of stay of the second language group.*

Schumann adheres to common sense conclusions when he hypothesizes that social conditions where second language groups are equal to target language groups, are assimilative, share many social and cultural facilities, are not cohesive among themselves, are congruent with target language groups, have positive attitudes and intend to remain among target language groups are more likely to have enhanced opportunities for learning the target language, and of being accepted into the target culture.

### **3.2.2 Individual Factors of Acculturation**

While sociocultural factors aim to explain conditions amenable or impedimentary to group acculturation, affective factors concern the individual's opportunity, or capability for learning, and may even operate in spite of social conditions (Spolsky 1989: 144). Affective factors refer to the 'emotional side of human behavior' (Brown 1987: 100) and include variables such as language and culture shock, desire, motivation, empathy and 'ego-permeability' (Schumann 1986), as well as considerations of self-esteem, risk-taking, anxiety and extroversion/introversion (Brown 1987), with most of these overlapping and affecting other in various ways.

*Language shock* refers to adult learner's fears of appearing comic in front of TL speakers (Schumann 1986), which often results in an unwillingness to speak in the target language. It is considered to affect adults more because they have developed social inhibitions, whereas children are not as concerned with the social impressions they are making. *Culture shock* is a more familiar concept which describes the loss of the sense of independence in dealing with daily activities, the often ineffective coping strategies one uses, and the general disorientation and anxiety resulting from unfamiliar practices, norms and meanings. *Motivation* is divided into two categories, integrative and instrumental. With integrative motives a person's reasons for studying and learning the TL are to communicate with and learn about the target community (i.e. to integrate), whereas instrumentally motivated learners study the TL simply to enhance employment opportunities or

gain recognition from own membership groups (Schumann 1986: 383). Finally, the notion of empathy and *ego-permeability* draws on Guiora's influential work on identity and self-representation.

Guiora's position is that social agents develop not only body egos (referring to the Freudian construct), but also 'language egos' (Guiora et al. 1972). During growth and socialization actors form boundaries of self-representation around these egos, so that while in early stages these boundaries are permeable, by adulthood they are much less plastic. The degree of permeability is considered to have an important effect on the ability to change one's self-representation, and this includes practices ranging from to pronunciation to social behavior. Parallel to this, ego-permeability reflects an ability to develop empathy for others (where empathy is defined as the ability to project 'one's own personality into the personality of another in order to understand him or her better' [Brown 1987: 107]). In terms of second language and culture learning, Guiora's hypothesizes that 'ego-permeability can be induced by lowering the learner's level of inhibition' (Schumann 1986: 384), although how this might be done is left for the reader to speculate.

From empirical research these and other researchers (e.g. Acton and Walker de Felix 1986, Gardner and Lambert 1972, Gardner 1985, Guiora et al. 1972) have concluded that integrative motivation, empathy and positive attitudes toward target groups, as well as lowered inhibitions, higher self-esteem and extrovert behavior in interaction all enhance acculturation. Researchers also conclude that it is important to help learners 'accept the frustration and ambiguity that is inherent in acculturation' (Mantle-Bromley 1992: 119), And while one might think that these variables only affect acculturation, Schumann clearly thinks of acculturation as determinative and primary to L2 acquisition:

Acculturation as a remote cause brings the learner into contact with TL-speakers. Verbal interaction with those speakers as a proximate cause brings about the negotiation of appropriate input which then operates as the immediate cause of language acquisition. Acculturation is then of particular importance because it initiates the chain of causality. (Schumann 1986: 385)

In terms of the actual process of acculturation, Hanvey (1976) describes four stages which are said to occur to the learner. Level One is the level at which the learner has a more or less stereotyped perspective of target groups. With increased contact the learner experiences culture shock, at level Two, which is characterized by frustration, anxiety and a range of other discomforts and negative responses. With positive attitude and with opportunities to adapt to newer patterns the learner may reach Level Three, at which behavior interpreted as 'wrong' is considered 'alternative'. At Level Four, the learner attains an empathetic perspective and understands how natives feel. This process is not linear, and stages are not final once attained, as learners will fluctuate between stages a number of times, especially when encountering new practices and events (Hanvey 1976)

*Immersion and Culture Shock.* There is research, theory and anecdotal evidence which contradicts, or at least moderates, claims that immersion in a foreign language speaking culture is conducive and even causative of acculturation. While common sense conclusions like Schumann's hold that foreign or second language learners given the right conditions will acquire the language by being immersed in it, by being a resident among native speakers, many scholars realize that 'mere exposure to practices themselves is not enough' (Hall 1993: 160) and that merely being situated in the target culture does not lead to acquisition (see also Kramsch 1991; Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco 1999; Crozet and Liddicoat 1999b). This holds equally for purely linguistic ability as well as toward more socially integrated behavior, as many immigrant experiences will attest<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, Coleman presents the findings of a study which suggest that not only do learners have 'clear national stereotypes', prior to cultural exposure but that, 'counter-intuitively' they are often reinforced by extended target community residence (Coleman 1998: 59). Foreign culture residence, or closer social distance alone then, is no guarantee to cultural empathy or learning. Moreover, it is not only an individual-level phenomenon, but

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<sup>5</sup> This debate over the efficacy of immersion does not often specify or define what exactly 'immersion' means.

a group one as well. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz note that cross-cultural differences

do not disappear with the increasing intensity of intergroup contact. On the contrary, they seem to increase and often become most acute after the groups involved have been in contact for several years and initial grammatical differences have disappeared (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982: 3)

Many other writers comment on the processes of culture shock which affect learning, though it is difficult to find evidence as to whether it is considered epistemologically useful and positive, or obstructive and negative. Indeed, Damen quotes Harris and Moran to the effect that 'culture shock is neither good or bad, necessary or unnecessary. It is a reality that many people face when in strange and unexpected situation.' (Damen 1987: 226) Of scattered commentators, Nostrand (1966) has argued that measured doses of culture shock were important for the process of cross-cultural awareness. Brown too concludes that it is important that learners be allowed to go through the stages of culture shock: 'We should not expect learners to deny the anger, the frustration, the helplessness and homelessness they feel' (Brown 1987: 132). And we might recall Kramsch (1993) also, as one of the few who advocates a confrontation with tension and struggle as being the most interesting and fruitful learning experience.

Culture shock is often considered to entail a movement through four levels – honeymoon, hostility, healing and health (Adler 1987) (which curiously parallels Hanvey's description of acculturation *per se*, described above, suggesting that acculturation can be equated with culture shock) and an awareness of these common experiences has led researchers to speculate as to whether there is a critical period – an 'acculturation threshold' (Acton and Walker de Felix 1986) - of culture learning. Acton and Walker de Felix (1986) draw on research from cognitive, affective and psychological perspectives to support the thesis that stage 3 (healing), a period of 'tension, awareness of significant contrastive differences, and

a period of minimum social distance'<sup>6</sup> (Damen 1987: 227) appears to be the one that provides the window of opportunity for culture learning.

### 3.2.3 *Cognitive Aspects of Acculturation*

It has already been noted that SLA does not have a unified or coherent explanation for cognitive processes that occur during acculturation, and it is certainly the weakest area in SCA research. Theories that do purport to describe what causes acquisition – Krashen's (1982) Monitor Model of  $i + 1$ <sup>7</sup> comes readily to mind – are as usual concerned with language as a code, and with linguistic 'uptake,' and models like Krashen's tend to regard the notion of input over and above any interest in the neglected notion of comprehension. For Kramsch the reasons for the lack of research is clear: 'the acquisition of cultural competence or of foreign discourse competence never did fit into an input-output model of language acquisition and so has not really been tackled yet by second language acquisition research' (Kramsch 1995: 54).

Byram too argues that the second culture learner 'has to acquire a new representation' (Byram 1988a: 5). The fact that learning a culture entails new *representations* (we can overlook Byram's use of the singular) as opposed to memorization of linguistic units or syntax may provide a clue not only as to why an absence of cognitive aspects of acculturation research prevails, but also why researching how cultural representations, associations and semiotic schema – not to mention behavioral patterns which Byram himself overlooks – are acquired is so complex and difficult. Byram's own answer to the acculturation process – that learners have to take an 'imaginative leap' (Byram 1988: 87; also 91, 95), while in many ways true, is nonetheless unsatisfactorily abstract.

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of cultural and social distance, as the distance in degree of difference between members of different cultures, is described by Schumann (1978). It was modified by Acton (1979) to refer to *perceived* distance by cultural members living in proximity, rather than an unmeasurable *actual* difference in Schumann's model.

<sup>7</sup>  $i + 1$  refers to the hypothesis that acquisition will take place when learners are exposed to input ( $i$ ) that is slightly above their level of current comprehension ( $+1$ )

### **3.3 Teaching Culture**

Although in recent years one can identify not only a greater awareness of the role of culture in communication, and therefore more arguments to the effect that culture should receive greater emphasis in the foreign language class, little has been done in terms of large-scale (i.e. syllabus level) implementation, nor have attempts to facilitate opportunities to develop sociocultural competence necessarily succeeded. Papaefthymiou-Lytra notes that when one looks at syllabuses, even ones which do explicitly make note of the importance of culture, 'one realizes that, in reality, the learner is provided with fragmented information consisting of facts about culture as it relates to language in use' (Papaefthymiou-Lytra 1995: 133). Perhaps for this reason serious commentators have made a concerted attempt to move away from the relatively undisciplined culture-as-fragmented-information approach. The following sections aim to summarize the main methods of teaching culture.

The teaching of culture can be regarded at two levels: approach and procedure. In a slight recasting of the same terms used by Richards and Rodgers (1982) and White (1988), 'approach' is here taken to refer both to theoretical positions of language and language learning *combined with* arguments as to the 'specification for the selection and organization of content and a description of the role of teacher, learner and learning materials' (White 1988: 2-3) - in other words what Richards and Rodgers think of as 'design,' while 'procedure' (and less 'method', when the context is hopefully clear enough to indicate 'classroom activities') is taken to refer to practices that occur in the class.

#### **3.3.1 General Theoretical Considerations and Approaches**

One consistent belief among scholars is that because culture is learned, it can and should be taught: 'culture is not acquired through osmosis. It must be taught explicitly.' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1999: 120) Crozet *et al.* summarize four main approaches to culture regarding this explicit instruction: the traditional approach, the culture studies approach, the 'culture as practices' approach and, intercultural

language teaching (Crozet *et al.* 1999: 8-9). The first three approaches teach 'high' culture; history, geography and institutions and; the study of 'collective ways of acting through language' (Crozet *et al.* 1999: 9) respectively. The approach they favor and promote, however, is intercultural teaching, in which they aim to teach language as the 'most overt expression of culture', not as a separate or even separable part of it. They identify three of the most important features of its 'mode of operation' as:

1. The teaching of linguaculture
2. The comparison between learners' first language/culture and target language/culture
3. Intercultural exploration. (Crozet *et al.* 1999:11)

In aiming to teach linguaculture,<sup>8</sup> Crozet *et al.* argue for an approach 'which delves into the micro levels of culture as entwined in language use' (1999: 12), and the points of articulation between language and culture. To this end Crozet and Liddicoat, in another chapter of same volume, propose that learners be encouraged to ask 'about who the people interacting (or writing) are, for what purpose the language is used and in what context' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1999: 115).

By requiring a comparative approach Crozet *et al.* are in agreement with a number of other scholars (e.g. Byram 1991; Byram and Fleming 1998; Carr 1994; Lado 1957; Mantle-Bromley 1992; McLeod 1976), who argue that learning about another culture requires a knowledge of one's own. Mantle-Bromley (1992: 120) writes that 'self-understanding should not only be viewed...as a valuable consequence of acculturation, it is also the vehicle through which acculturation is achieved'.

Intercultural exploration is a more difficult concept that Crozet *et al.* aim to apply. Using Kramsch's notion of the 'third place' (Kramsch 1993), they consider such exploration to occur at the 'meeting place where the understanding of how different

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<sup>8</sup> A term which aims to encapsulate the inseparability of culture and language. Another term that has been coined is 'linguaculture' by Agar (1994).



worldviews operate...where unity and diversity can be reconciled' (Crozet *et al* 1999: 13). Intercultural explorers are students who, it seems, can objectively view their own cultural realities as well as those of the target culture, where they can 'articulate and resolve conflicts they...will encounter in trying to reconcile the sometimes opposite values between their native and target languages/cultures' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1999b: 4). In this way learners should develop intercultural competence, defined as 'the ability to recognise where and when culture is manifest in cross-cultural encounters and the ability to manage an intercultural space where all parties to the encounter are comfortable participants' (Crozet *et al.* 1999: 13).

For Kramsch 'the educational challenge is teaching language "as context" within a dialogic pedagogy that makes context explicit' (Kramsch 1993: 13). Her aim is to restructure and reconceptualize the language classroom, which should 'be viewed as the privileged site of cross-cultural fieldwork, in which the participants are both informants and ethnographers' (Kramsch 1993: 29). Kramsch is thus concerned with manipulating the 'culture of the classroom', where 'participants in the foreign language classroom create their own cultural context by shaping the conditions of enunciation/communication and the conditions of reception/interpretation of classroom discourse' (Kramsch 1993: 48). In terms of overall conceptualization of instituted culture learning then, Kramsch also tends to favor an exploratory approach.

Byram reveals functionalist tendencies, and therefore an emphasis on explanation:

In the context of foreign language teaching...to describe the behaviours, the artefacts, the institutions of a foreign culture is inadequate...it is necessary to *give an account* of the significance of behaviours, artefacts and institutions in terms of the culturally agreed meanings which they embody, of which they are realizations (Byram 1989: 84, emphasis added).

Also part of his approach is to target the affective domain of learners by examining (and changing where necessary) their attitudes to the target culture (e.g. Byram and

Esarte-Sarries 1991). Byram has also written frequently about the adoption of a cultural studies framework, from which a thematically inclined syllabus evolves, as well as the application of ethnographic methodology, a prospect which will be discussed in more detail below (Byram 1989; Byram *et al.* 1991).

Of other commentators, Papaefthymiou-Lytra centres on an explanatory perspective by arguing that there should be a more coherent aim, and that is to develop 'a working hypothesis' about the target culture (Papaefthymiou-Lytra 1995: 132). This is to be achieved through the construction of cultural taxonomies comprised of the 'basic factors...which shape and determine the way people act and behave'. Hypothesis testing is also a concept used by McLeod (1976), though neither writer goes into detail as to how hypotheses are supposed to be formulated, or by whom.

That culture should be studied with a thematic approach and with discussions of issues is considered by Flewelling (1994), as well as Byram and Cain (1998), while Kramer (1990) presents a convincing case for a 'handling [of] historical differences both between and among cultures. He thus stresses that the historical analysis of the target culture should not only come from literary texts, which represent dominant discourses, but from various media:

If we presented history through literary texts only – a thesis quite often advanced by people working in my discipline who say they want to save time for what they call 'real language teaching' – we could easily run the risk of seriously distorting it (Kramer 1990: 61).

Mantle-Bromley (1992) applies models of acculturation to her teaching approach and argues that learners need to be 'prepared' (that is, by teachers and coursework) to learn another culture, and that teachers need to be aware of acculturation factors that may prevent C2 learning. Preparation for C2 learning would include the introduction of ethnographic and anthropological perspectives and the need to acquaint learners with a relativist perspective of what language and culture are.

Rechniewski (1996) on the other hand has suggested that FLT use sociological models. She feels that a sociological approach 'offers a framework for the analysis of nationhood through a diachronic study of different elements – institutional, affective, ideological – constitutive of nation formation (Rechniewski 1996: 228). Using this framework Rechniewski aims to recognize society as a site of tension and conflict and sees the analysis of this fruitful for the language learner. Texts are chosen on the basis of their addressing 'current social and political debate' (Rechniewski 1996: 230), revealing perhaps after all, that this focus is on overt political 'issues', rather than the characteristics of daily life as a political struggle.

### *Teacher Roles*

What teachers are expected to be or do has always been an integral part of foreign language pedagogy, and this is equally if not more relevant in terms of culture teaching and learning. One important concern for example, is how teachers are expected to manage a cultural syllabus when they may have little expertise in cross-cultural comparison and analysis, or experience in the target culture (Arries 1994; Dłaska 2000). Conversely, teachers who are comfortable presenting culture may be 'unreliable, often prejudiced, sources of cultural information without necessarily being aware of it' (Dłaska 2000: 253). Of the roles teachers are expected to adapt, Damen feels that they

must develop special competencies as cross-cultural guides and intercultural communicators. Such competencies include personal commitments to the development of expertise in the processes of culture learning, understanding and knowledge of the cultural patterns of those they teach, and understanding of their own cultural givens (Damen 1987: 332).

In more concrete terms Damen (1987) suggests that teachers act as counselors, participant observers, pragmatic ethnographers and as mediators. But all of this must be set against the realities that continue to dog the implementation of a syllabus, the guiding principle of which is to facilitate the development intercultural awareness and communicative competence. Crozet and Liddicoat (1999b: 3) quote a teacher:

Sociocultural understanding just seems to be there – as a heading – I had no idea what it meant, what I was supposed to do with it; so I skipped it because I didn't understand it.

Among critical issues then, within the aim to incorporate culture in FLT, is that training and curricula should clarify not only aims, cultural content, methodology and procedure, but also teacher roles (not to mention student roles, which often remains largely ignored) as well as any additional training they should be expected to complete.

### **3.3.2 Activities and Tasks**

Actual classroom procedures of culture teaching have on the whole not lived up to the theoretical arguments that supposedly underpin them. Indeed, this is arguably the weakest area of CIFLL, and a target for the most criticism. While it has been easy to say that social context and communicative competence are crucial factors in the ability to interact, this has not on the whole transferred to the classroom.

Hadley distinguishes four common ways of treating culture in the class, none of which can be said to identify its importance in the production of meaning, in providing a cognitive 'map' as Kluckhohn (1944) conceives it, for individual behavior, social coherence or communicative competence. As can be seen, all four present culture as information and in segments:

**The Frankenstein Approach:** A taco from here, a flamenco dancer from there, a gaucho from here, a bullfight from there.

**The 4-F Approach:** Folk dances, festivals, fairs and food.

**The Tour Guide Approach:** The identification of monuments, rivers, and cities.

**The 'By-the-Way' Approach:** Sporadic lectures or bits of behaviour selected indiscriminately to emphasize sharp differences (Hadley 1993: 360, citing Galloway 1985).

While there is general agreement that culture should be presented as more than information, Risager (1991) surveys teaching materials, particularly textbooks, which provide at best only basic depictions of target cultures. Her survey also

explains why one of the most pressing and complex issues in cross-cultural analysis in the FL class is that of representation:

in the social and geographic definition of textbook characters, the people featured are predominantly middle-class, young people, isolated individuals (rather than family members) who are often tourists or visitors to urban centers. They engage in rather trivial linguistic interaction in mainly leisure activities or consumer situations. They reveal few feelings or opinions and never engage in social, moral, or philosophical problems. Most cultural information is bland. There is little historical background or cultural comparison – target countries are considered in isolation. There is an avoidance of indication of the authors' attitude and no invitation to critical analysis. (Risager 1991: 202-204)

Although her research is based on Scandinavian sources, these characteristics might apply to any number of teaching materials around the world. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) for example, provide a comprehensive survey on EFL materials in various countries, and find many similarities to Risager's findings, and Bex too sees culture in textbooks that is 'anodyne and bears little relationship to reality (1994: 60).

Classroom procedures, activities and tasks can also be subdivided into two categories. The first category of procedures are those which aim to increase a general awareness – a 'metaknowledge' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1999: 121), of universal cross-cultural concepts, of how cultures organize reality, and have determinative effects on perception and interpretation. The general goal of this study is to encourage a perspective of cultural relativity (McLeod 1976), and to foster positive attitudes to the target culture (Mantle-Bromley 1992). It is with this goal in mind that Mantle-Bromley argues that learners need to be prepared for culture study (see above), and Kane aims to develop an ethnographic framework through which students 'become aware of the complexity and contradictions of cultural discourse' (Kane 1991: 244).

The other category comprises those activities which aim to illuminate specific characteristics about a target culture, that is, to provide knowledge of specific features of the target culture. These may take place after learners have been 'prepared' by cultural concepts, or simply from scratch. Arries (1994) further

separates this into two approaches which he considers as 'activity' and 'anthropology-process,' which, as their names suggest, reflect the advocacy of specific activities, and the use of units of study using anthropological techniques. Of the first type, activities or techniques include<sup>9</sup>:

*Culture assimilators*: Learners are given a description of 'critical incidents' of cross-cultural misunderstandings which are often experienced by speakers, and are presented with a number of alternative explanations (usually four) from which they have to guess the correct conclusion.

*Culture capsule*: Similar to culture assimilators, but here the teacher presents 'one essential difference' (Hughes 1986: 167) between native and target cultures, accompanied by visuals, and which is then followed by a discussion and questions.

*Culture clusters*: are a series of capsules gathered to address a particular theme or issue.

*Minidramas*: Role playing and situational exercises the focus of which is a cross-cultural misunderstanding, which is clarified in the final scene. In a volume of papers edited by Byram and Fleming (1998), a number of authors present various means of using drama as a culture learning approach. Heathcote and Bolton (1998: 160) for example, argue that dramas 'train pupils to look beyond the surface action [s]...to the personal and cultural values that sustain them'.

*Audiomotor Unit, or Total Physical Response*: Mainly used as listening exercises Total Physical Response involves commands that are 'arranged in an order that will cause students to act out a *cultural experience*' (Hughes 1986). Related to Total Physical response, is the Gouin Series, which is promoted by Arries (1994), whereby learners do not act out commands, but first-person statements.

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<sup>9</sup> The following examples have various sources, including Hughes (1986) and Damen (1987).

Others activities include informant interviews (Arries 1994), where native speakers join classes for questions and discussion, the use of the Internet (e.g. Dlaska 2000; Donaldson and Kötter 1999), CALL software and other media, and discourse analysis (e.g. Lezberg and Hilferty 1978; Murphy-Lejeune *et al.* 1996), but with a greater cultural focus.

The activities described above however are 'one-off' events – exercises that can be used by instructors in a single class on an ad hoc and random basis. There have been very few attempts to develop syllabuses in which culture and language in its cultural context are the sustained interest and aim. Culture assimilators, capsules and clusters moreover, are both beneficial in that they can be (and usually are) employed solely in learner's native languages, but are disadvantageous for the same reason, that is, they do not to any significant degree even focus on the target language, but on misunderstandings arising from differing socio-cultural practices. Indeed, these activities tend to be used more in contexts of 'training' travelers (short and long-term business people, tourists) in the 'art' of cross-cultural communication, rather than bilingual and bicultural communication, and speakers of foreign cultures are actually even assumed to speak the traveler's tongue – which in most cases is American English. One interesting, not to mention intriguing approach to developing a sustained, culturally weighted syllabus, is as Arries notes the 'anthropology process', which entails the use of ethnography, anthropology and cultural studies in the FL class, though their applications are variously envisioned.

### **3.3.3 *Ethnography, Anthropology and Culture Studies: Future Directions?***

That an interdisciplinary approach toward advancing theory and analyzing culture in the foreign language classroom has benefits for FLT and SLA has been the 'next logical step' for the field for some years. In a rather precocious article, McLeod (1976) sees anthropology as being relevant to FLT in three ways. Foreign language teaching, she argues, can adopt the anthropological definition of culture as a shared system, the concept of cultural relativity, and anthropological methodology of

comparing two cultures as a 'valuable way of discovering the characteristics of each' (McLeod 1976: 212). Her perspective is thus an early representative of the second – and much less applied – category of culture teaching that Arries describes.

Perhaps the most significant and most appropriate field from which new ideas and procedures have come is ethnography. However, whereas in general education the quantity of ethnographic studies is too numerous to list, the approach has had a much weaker role in foreign language education (Holliday 1996). Holliday points out that the studies undertaken have had significantly different foci for those in general education. In English language education for example, researcher's have focused on research of and within classrooms, student participation, talk, and methodology whereas in general education researchers have considered classrooms in their wider social context, have observed wider ranges of behavior (than language) and studied the 'business' of education as a whole (Holliday 1996). Holliday attributes this difference to a number of factors, such as: the 'emphasis on applied linguistics at a micro, psychological level' resulting in a 'major focus on what happens to *language* during the classroom practice' (Holliday 1996: 237, emphasis in original), and the 'prevailing culture of positivism' (Holliday 1996: 238) contributing to the abstraction of the classroom from its wider social setting, an emphasis on methodology, and the adoption of an emic approach.

Ethnography applied in foreign language pedagogy is thus a researcher's tool to what happens in the classroom (e.g. Atkinson and Ramanathan 1995; Flowerdew and Miller 1995; Van Lier 1988; Willett 1995; Zaharlick and Green 1991), a methodological issue as to its potential use (e.g. Athanases and Heath 1995; Scollon 1995; Ramanathan and Atkinson 1999; Watson-Gegeo 1988), or used for insight to improve teacher development (e.g. Allen 2000; Sercu 1998). In short, 'the popular view of ethnography in English language education is that it is to do with transcriptions of what students and teachers say either in or about the classroom' (Holliday 1996: 238).



Holliday's remedy to this restricted application of ethnography is for researchers to consider the 'wider social realities which influence the classroom' (Holliday 1996: 238), and that they thus adopt a 'sociological imagination', a term he borrows from Mills, which refers to the 'ability to locate oneself and one's actions critically within a wider community or world scenario' (Holliday 1996: 235). This wider perspective and approach would admit non-verbatim data, be more culturally sensitive and ethically aware. But again, Holliday here addresses the potential to apply ethnography in English language education as 'a qualitative, interpretative research tool which looks at small groups as cultures' (Holliday 1996: 234), and thus joins the majority of theorists who see ethnography as the researcher's or at best, the teacher's procedural arsenal, rather than one that might be applied *by* language learners themselves.

The suggestion that learners become amateur anthropologists or ethnographers has been made however, albeit often in only passing. Examples of a more involved consideration include Barro *et al.* (1998), Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991), Damen (1987), and McLeod (1976). Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991: 10) argue that learners should 'become acquainted with the procedures and processes' of ethnography, rather than merely use its products, so that learners can elicit an account of a native speaker's culture, and that through this approach, as well as through textual analysis, the learner will ultimately 'produce his own account of the foreign culture' (Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991: 12).

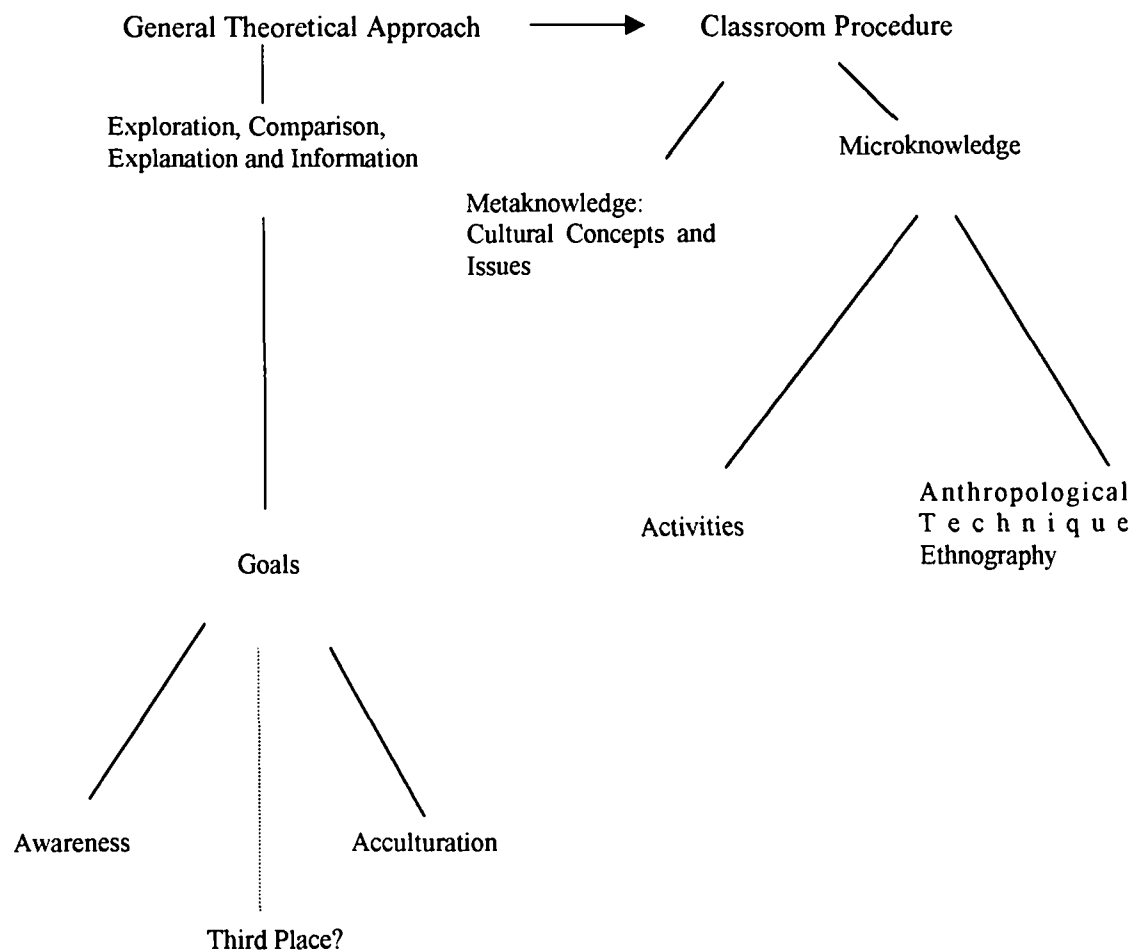
Barro *et al.* also see great possibilities in the learners-as-ethnographers approach. Developing their perspective from Hymes' ethnography of communication, and Geertz's method of 'thick description', they want to combine both an intellectual and experiential approach, and hold that 'the notion of the language learner as ethnographer aims to combine the experience of the ethnographer in the field and a set of conceptual frameworks for cultural analysis with the best practice from communicative and immersion language learning' (Barro *et al.* 1998: 80). They report on a three year program developed at Thames Valley University. Over the

three years learners were introduced to ethnographic research procedures (first year), spent a year abroad undertaking ethnographic research (the year abroad is part of a standard language major degree in the UK), and then spent the final year writing up their research. They justify the adoption of ethnographic method by arguing that: 'learning method without a conceptual framework drawn from anthropology would offer skills without intellectual content, encouragement to collect data without the understandings to analyse it and draw patterns out of it.' (Barro *et al* 1998: 82) They also argue that the analysis and writing-up stage enhances communicative competence as it provides learners with the opportunity to 'reflect on their own and others' cultural systems and this habit of analysis and interpretation is a transferable habit which they can draw on in the future in whatever contexts they live and work in' (Barro *et al.* 1998: 97).

In the main, the promotion of the ethnographic approach to language and culture learning is based on the belief that it provides a conceptual framework for asking the 'right' questions about the observed instances of interactions in the target culture. This contrasts with other approaches which can be seen to represent explanatory, exploratory, comparative or the informational approaches to teaching culture, or raising cultural awareness.

In sum, the study of culture operates across at least two separate levels, which can be considered as meta- and micro- knowledge, in which culture as a universal category *per se* is addressed, or the patterns of specific target cultures are explored. A diagram may be of use to illustrate this web of current approaches to culture:

Figure 3.1 Tree Diagram of Culture Teaching: Approaches and Procedures



This diagram includes a branch which concerns the perceived goals of an analysis of culture in the foreign language class, which is the topic of the next section.

### **3.4 Problems in Determining the Goals of Teaching and Learning Culture**

If it is possible to outline a number of reasons *why* culture should be taught, a follow-up consideration is determining more concretely the *goal* of culture teaching. Just as communicative language teaching had as its goal communicative competence, so too must culture teaching have its goal. But, like the problems encountered in defining communicative competence, the notion of cross-cultural competence does not permit of any simple conceptualization. Reflection on what the goal of culture learning in FLT should be creates ruptures and tensions, and many difficult questions are raised – particularly because the terms in which the answers are framed are so ambiguous.

A list of goals would include questions as to whether the study of culture should enable learners to:

1. develop empathy for target culture norms and values;
2. end up 'being' like C2 members;
3. be aware of differences between the target culture and their own;
4. have a knowledge of the national culture, its historical identity and historical information;
5. have a practical competence in terms of appropriate behaviors in given situations, or;
6. become linguistically competent.

Of this list it is possible to see that while the latter four goals might more easily be facilitated through the use of factual description, information and rules, the first two are much more abstract and unwieldy. The first calls for the learner in some way to change his or her cognitive and affective state, while the second would demand this as well as imply a reconfiguration of perception, physical bearing, logic and so on. And this is before anyone has had the chance to point out that empathy and 'being' require a unified, manifest totality against which to measure the criteria of success.

For various reasons therefore, many writers object to the connotation of enforcement that the goal to develop cross-cultural competence sometimes carries. Bentahila and Davies (1989: 106) speak for the majority viewpoint when they argue that there is 'something of a moral objection to the imposition of foreign cultural norms' on foreign language learners. Alptekin (1993; 2002) too writes frequently of his unease of accepting the 'native' speaker as role model for pedagogy, summarizing among other reasons, the dialects within and across English-language countries as unmanageably numerous from a pedagogical perspective; the unofficial English as Second Language countries spoken by millions of people, as in India; the fact that English is widely accepted as the lingua franca in commerce and academia among other fields, and; not least because native speakers do not necessarily conform to an ideal representation, that is, as 'arbiters of well-formedness and appropriacy.' (Alptekin 1993: 140)

Instead of passive acceptance or internalization of cultural norms then, being aware of and understanding differences across cultures are the goals most favored by pedagogues and scholars. Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991: 201) for example advocate 'intercultural understanding' rather than 'cultural competence'. The difference, as they see it, is that whereas the notion of cultural competence focuses on and assesses learners' demonstration of superficial behavioral norms, and knowledge of values and meanings, 'intercultural understanding' aims toward a critical approach to studying the target culture. Students are 'encouraged to suspend their native-culture framework of concepts in order to see the foreign culture from within its own framework' (Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991: 202). The aim for intercultural understanding then, encourages not tolerance, but 'true understanding' (Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991: 201). In similar fashion, Seelye writes that:

There should be no controversy about the aim of accurate communication, and this includes understanding the culturally based mores of the target people but does not necessarily include professing or internalizing them.' (Seelye 1993: 21)

In many ways this brings the issue back to square one however, since it raises the question of what the difference is between understanding and internalizing, or even

what the two terms mean. Is understanding not an internalized state? Does one not need in some way to accept the logic or concept of an act or meaning in order to understand it? There seems to be a contradiction therefore, when Crozet and Liddicoat write: 'the ultimate goal of ILT is to help learners transcend their singular world view through the learning of a foreign practitioner's point of view and concerns' (Crozet and Liddicoat 1999b: 3). Assuming there are 'singular' world views, doesn't the learning of foreign viewpoints imply a degree of 'cultural' internalization?

As goals in their own right, moreover, 'awareness' or 'true understanding' seem to be somewhat aimless. What is the point or purpose of being 'aware'? Presumably awareness of cultural difference must be coupled with an ability to put such consciousness to use, namely, by being able to communicate. For this reason it continues to be an issue as to whether culture learning and teaching should directly affect language learning, or if they can be treated separately. Kramsch for her part is unequivocal: 'The responsibility of the language teacher is to teach culture *as it is mediated through language*, not as it is studied by social scientists and anthropologists' (Kramsch 1998b: 31 emphasis in original).

Pointing out that 'there is little guidance currently available on what cultural knowledge is essential to foreign language learning' (Lambert 1999: 67), Lambert addresses the problem of how culture should be infused into language teaching. He differentiates between knowing *about* cultures and possessing the right *skills* and *attitudes* for global competence, and identifies knowledge, empathy, approval and task performance as necessary goals. But this is problematic for him as it presents the difficulty of choosing cultural materials, a task which takes on mammoth proportions:

if the goal is to present the full social and cultural context for language behaviour, then the complete range of materials covered in each of the social sciences and humanities should be included in foreign language classes (Lambert 1999: 66).

All he can but do in the end is to suggest that each of these areas require more research, although he does intone that teaching goals should be aligned with vocational needs of learners (Lambert 1999: 70).

Meyer (1991) distinguishes between three levels of performative ability that learners may reach: monocultural, intercultural, and transcultural. The monocultural level of performance is relatively straightforward, and refers to learners' inability to conceive of other perspectives and behaviors. The intercultural level is one in which the learner can explain cultural differences between native and target cultures based on sociological, historical, psychological or economic information (Meyer 1991: 142). Transcultural competence is seen as the ability to solve intercultural problems by virtue of the fact that the learner can 'develop his own identity *in the light of* cross-cultural understanding' (Meyer 1991: 143 emphasis in original), as well as 'negotiate meaning where negotiation is possible (Meyer 1991: 143). In this sense, the learner can 'stand above both his own and the foreign culture' (Meyer 1991: 143).

There is difficulty having in having performance graded so categorically, as though the learner passes from one stage to another in measurable doses or distinguishable moments. And in light of examples Meyer gives, the negotiation of meaning refers to speakers solving conflict and political differences, which overlooks the fact that negotiation, in the sense of simply trying to have a conversation, can and does occur among cultural strangers at all levels.

Boundaries, places and standing beyond our outside them is a common metaphor in these discussions. Kramsch's (1993) notion of the 'third place' is an echo of Meyer's definition of transcultural competence, and is a concept that has found favor in many circles, with a book length treatment and dedication being published in 1999 by Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet. On first glance the metaphor of the third place makes some sense. Bicultural people, long term residents or even

bilingual travelers frequently have the feeling of 'belonging' neither to their native culture, since foreign experience has provided them with a different perspective of it – nor to their host culture, since, despite being able to function and communicate perfectly well in it they continue to have an outsider's perspective in terms of opportunities to participate in cultural practices.

As White (1988) points out, different curricula, including language curricula, reflect various ideologies and value systems of education, and perhaps this is one of the main reasons why satisfactorily determining the goals of culture teaching is problematic. White names three main ideologies of education, which express themselves variously in the design of aims, content and methodology: classical humanism, progressivism and reconstructionism. In classical humanism the goal is the transmission of 'esteemed cultural heritage' (White 1988: 24), while in progressivism the goal stresses growth and self-realization, and in reconstructionism the ideological goal conceives of education as an instrument of social change.

It is clear to see how confusion might arise here. One might presume for example that if the goal of culture learning is empathy, or the achievement of an emic viewpoint, then in many ways a classical humanist ideology would be more suitable, since its aim is to create conformity and conventional perspectives and rationales. Yet much of the current ideology of education advocates the goal empowerment and critical thought, and many scholars argue for a critical approach to the study of culture. This is obviously more indicative of the progressivist paradigm. Educationalists may therefore be torn by the recognizing the paradoxical requirement of conceptual correspondence with the target culture, and the ideological aim to encourage critical (and by direct implication 'individual' and sometimes contrary) thought.

White also discusses the difference between goals, aims and objectives. Goals he identifies as being the most general and broad. Aims, as their metaphorical use



denotes, represent a target to be aimed at, and are more specific. Objectives finally are short term goals and the most specific. They are characterized by stating the purposes and outcomes of activities and courses of study in measurable and unambiguous terms (White 1988: 27). These three terms are subsumed under what is called means-ends structure of education, which Stern (1984: 501) observes is 'unavoidable in language pedagogy', and which lends itself to planning, organization and evaluation.

Yet this might reveal itself to be the crux of the problem in determining goals of studying culture, as it raises the problem over the distinction between goals of culture *teaching* and the goals of culture *learning*. Whereas the model of economy (i.e. the means-ends framework) in institutionalized teaching requires conditions so that goals can be defined according to criteria of assessment, measurement and efficiency (i.e. 'at the end of the class/course, the student will be able to...'), the outcome of learning, at least according to the progressivist ideal, is not defined according to the same end-point criteria (as the term 'goal' implies). Perhaps after all, intercultural competence cannot be defined or measured in the way an educational perspective would like, *even if* terms like 'skill', 'ability', or 'knowledge' can be applied to such competence.

The hope to determine the goal of studying culture in the FL class then, is beset by problems on a number of levels. For one it is characterized by the need to establish definitions for a host of ambiguous terms and unquantifiable states. Among them are 'understanding', 'awareness', 'internalization', 'knowledge', 'competence', and 'appropriacy'. On another level there is confusion as to whether the study of culture should directly benefit language learning, and be *infused* into the language curricula, or if culture should simply be more supplementary in terms of awareness raising and affective considerations such as empathy. Further, there is the difficulty in reconciling educationally conceived and managed (and manageable) goals and those of learners, who ultimately, one might confidently argue, want to be capable of fulfilling interactive and communicational needs beyond those of the class.

### 3.5 Critiques of CIFLL Studies and Teaching

Critiques regarding CIFLL can be made on two levels. First, one can embrace the arguments made by the handful of scholars who, as it has already been shown, criticize the lack of stress on culture in FL pedagogy, as well as the weakness of that which is considered. On another level however, it is possible to scrutinize *their* attempts to introduce culture and the models they have offered.

Although some criticism has already been mentioned in passing, further comments are warranted in this section, which may be cast in the light of the three main themes of this thesis. First, in terms of ontological positions, one might reconsider just how much scholars do appreciate the ambiguity and 'open-endedness' of culture, as well as social agents, or alternatively, if they do have a coherent theory of culture at all.

In a critique of Kramersch's 1993 book *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, de Nooy illuminates a number of Kramersch's weaknesses and oversights in this respect. For example, despite her frequent insistence on interpretation, multiple and negotiated meanings, and the contingency of context, Kramersch often concedes to a concept of semantic stability. De Nooy quotes Kramersch describing 'learners accepting ready-made meanings' (Kramersch 1993: 239) – and notes that:

for Kramersch, meaning production does not occur in all social intercourse, but only when a speaker rejects a pre-existing meaning to create a personal one. These lapses seem to invoke a semantic model for culture, whereby a culture is a set of meanings, a sort of code to be deciphered (de Nooy 1996: 209).

De Nooy also points out that there is 'a certain tension in Kramersch's work between two ways of seeing culture: that is, between culture seen as *defined* by diversity, constituted by tensions, and culture as an established structure *defied* by diversity' (de Nooy 1996: 207 emphasis added). This tension leaves Kramersch conceiving of culture 'as heterogeneous, but that heterogeneity tends to be absorbed into individualism' (de Nooy 1996: 207), ultimately therefore, undermining the notion of culture that Kramersch struggles to uphold.

Turning to Kramersch's vision of the interplay between cultural reality and cultural imagination within and across two cultures, which Kramersch represents with a diagram resembling two bull's eyes, de Nooy is quick to point out that despite Kramersch's inevitable disclaimers and repetition regarding multifacetedness, Kramersch places 'real' culture in the center: 'culture is presented here as closed, coherent and centred'. Such placement, she humorously notes, 'gives a whole new meaning to "target culture"' (de Nooy 1996: 211).

While Kramersch makes much of the notion of context as being aligned along five axes: linguistic, situational, interactional, cultural and intertextual (Kramersch 1993: 46), she cannot but help to reduce it to a single one in the end, when she argues that context is 'the product of linguistic choices' (Kramersch 1993: 46). One might therefore return to Kramersch's insistence that culture should be studied only in terms of how it is mediated in language, as it brings to mind a reproach made by Corson:

The kind of 'context' that usually interest applied linguists often pulls up short of contextual issues that go beyond language itself [and which can leave one with] a rather impoverished conception of context if we cash it out only in cultural matters that can be expressed in language. (Corson 1997: 181)

Thus, while their attempts to widen the list of relevant considerations for language learning are laudable, criticisms such as these are justified as they raise the issue of representation and the 'knowability' of culture.

This brings us to epistemological issues. It is necessary for instance to return to the idea of 'true understanding' that Byram and Esarte-Sarries advocate as a viable goal, and ask what such understanding entails. In light of arguments against the possible imposition of norms, there seem to be some contradictions. Is language not, in social context, characterized by normative patterns? Were these scholars not happy to impose linguistic norms in their teaching? Is there not a contradiction between rejecting essentialized descriptions of homogenous and monolithic and static cultures, and the idea that learners can develop an emic perspective, a feeling

of 'being inside the heads of others' (Damen 1987: 217)? One can't have it both ways.

What is the point of 'being aware', and then not doing anything about it when it comes to cross-cultural interaction? Isn't the point of being interculturally competent to be able to communicate in more appropriate manner? Should the learner who is aware of Thai practices of not touching the heads of others continue to touch the heads of Thais? Or rather, should the learner not have the right to chose for him- or herself which norms, practices and even ideas they accept and practice?

Kubota (1999a) writes of the essentializing processes of pedagogical discourses which reinforce West-East dichotomization in terms of, for example individualist and collectivist descriptions, or the practice of critical thinking and its absence. She discusses researchers who criticize 'deterministic thinking that regards students as rigidly bound by cultural traditions' (Kubota 1999a: 4)<sup>10</sup>. She therefore cites Sato (1996) to the effect that 'terms such as 'individual', 'authority' and 'ability' take on new meaning when cast in another cultural framework' (Kubota 1999a: 24, citing Sato 1996). She is right in arguing, therefore, for the 'need to understand the labels such as individualism and creativity within a specific cultural context' (Kubota 1999a: 25).

One must also consider criticisms that have emerged from the recent emphasis on culture. Somewhat unusually, Alptekin (1993) critiques 'orthodox' belief as to the tightness of the connection between language and culture. He accepts and applies the distinction Widdowson (1990) makes between schematic and systematic knowledge to argue that 'target-culture elements' should not be used as a model for (English) language materials, since the schemata (i.e. cultural knowledge) that learners will require to understand them do not accord to the schematic knowledge

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<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the notion of cultural determinism and 'rigidity' need not be conflated, as they often are. It is quite possible for example, to conceive as cultures in which *fluidity* is 'determined', and in fact a deconstructionist perspective would hold that this is necessarily because cultural determinism is itself predicated on and contains its opposite.

they already possess. This inconsistency, or lack of 'fit,' argues Alptekin, represents an obstacle for the learner's ability to process systematic knowledge: 'Familiarity with both content and formal schemas enables the learners to place more emphasis on systematic data, as their cognitive processing is not so much taken by the alien features of the target-language background' (Alptekin 1993: 140).

One confusing aspect of the discourses of Cifll is the frequent argument that culture is essentialized or conceptually reduced. If so many writers make this claim, who are they making it about? There is rarely any direct reference to what approaches or methodologies that they have in mind. This question may indeed reflect the emergence of a specialist discipline in which arguments are directed 'everyone else' except the few heavyweights within the group. Yet these writers – Kramsch, Byram, Atkinson can often be seen to be equally culpable for having reductionist perspectives. Kramsch almost makes this a virtue:

Cultural relativity stops at the threshold of the teacher's classroom. Not because the educational culture of the language class reflects by necessity the dominant culture of the institution, but because teachers could not teach if they did not make pedagogical choices (Kramsch 1993: 183).

In other words, in practical terms culture *has* to be reduced in order for any progress to be made. This is not in itself disputed, except to say that it signals an introduction to questions as to the basis of these choices. On what theoretical grounds are these choices made? What epistemological and ontological assumptions do they make? Who can legitimately make them on behalf of students? Thus, finally, the ethical dimension comes to the fore. Yet it is safe to say that the majority of discussions never raise this dimension, even when it is implicit in them. If culture and meaning is multiple, who gets to choose what singularities within it are important, and why?

### **3.6 Summary and Discussion**

It is relatively easy to choose an aspect of a target culture and explain it to learners in a descriptive and factual manner. However, when questions as to the purpose of this description are asked, when issues of 'truthful' representation are considered, when the aim is for learners to 'take' knowledge, or cross-cultural competence away from the class, when the complexity of culture is acknowledged – or its existence questioned, and when from all of this one hopes for methodological rigor, and a fully integrated, rather than supplementary syllabus of culture in foreign language learning, then it is easy to agree with Damen that the complexity of culture and trying to understand it is mind boggling.

In chapter 2 it was shown that CLT methodology, while emphasizing functions of communication and communicative competence, has continued to overlook cultural features underlying the conditions that give rise to communicative contexts. This chapter went on to review the main efforts that have been undertaken to redress this imbalance.

While in comparison to other specialties the number of researchers and scholars is relatively small, the depth of much of their work is impressive. Many of the principles are sound and applicable, and will be encountered again when considering the overall framework for a C2 course. So why is culture as yet *not* as impressively, comprehensively or universally taught? And if it is such good work, what remains to be done? Critiques raising issues of representation, objectification and learning theories offered so far provide a good starting point. Moreover, there are, as far as the author is aware, no syllabus-level frameworks, as most scholars have so far chosen to address particular classroom problems. And of course, while commendable, the perspectives of culture can still be modified and improved; rarely have all the principles various researchers proposed ever been amalgamated into one general approach

There are however a number of principles that these CIFLL researchers have established that can be borne in mind and indeed will be developed in the coming chapters. Some of these principles include:

1. that foreign language learning involves intercultural understanding
2. that culture is fluid and more than simplified facts
3. that context is a central concept
4. that there is a need explicitly to teach and study culture
5. that understanding the other involves knowing the self

Most honest scholars would agree that foreign language pedagogy has barely moved beyond the definitional stage of choosing from various disciplines what culture 'is'. Yet the transference of hard won anthropological or sociological *definitions* of culture, which imply that major ontological, epistemological and methodological questions have been resolved, is not enough. What is required is that the analysis of culture in foreign pedagogy develops a framework to suit its purposes, and time and effort can be saved if we take off from the positions that latter-day social theory has reached, but only if we more fully understand them.

Hall notes that 'Simply talking about 'cultural differences' and how we must respect them is a hollow cliché' (Hall 1976: 63). While it would be unfair to suggest that the contributors to CIFLL are merely paying lip service to fashionable ideas, closer analysis reveals that – apart from the fact that the subject is considered only by relatively few researchers and theorists – many of the arguments are based on little more than currently circulating received wisdom. If much of what has been reviewed about the argument for a greater focus on culture seems repetitive, it is because it *is* repetitive. That is, one can wade through tomes of literature – that 'burgeoning bibliography' – which support a greater emphasis on culture, 'because language and culture are intimately related', but offer little by way of how this is to be done. And when practical ideas are offered, they seem to reproduce little more than the same conceptual as well as temporal-spatial conditions and thus limitations that Foreign Language Teaching endures and tolerates. If scholars have looked to

cross-cultural psychology or anthropology (Kramsch 1993; Thanasoulas 2001) it is with a view to understand 'what culture is' rather than how to actually make sense of it.

That is not to say that what is advanced is wrong, but that much of what of it is founded more on 'commonsensical' rather than rigid formulations, conceptualizations and approaches, so that while many arguments may turn out to be quite tenable, they need to be based on a more thoroughly and ethically developed epistemological framework. Lo Bianco et al's (1999) claim that FLT can no longer support such a state of affairs is warranted. What is needed is more than a collection of arguments for more culture.

So far most of what has been said refers to a discourse in which experts are appealing to experts to in effect 'change their attitude' regarding the implementation and use of the cultural component. While this proselytizing is important and needs to continue, arguably it is student who needs to be convinced that one of the 'reasons for frustration in language learning and failure in cross-cultural communication are... cultural rather than linguistic in nature' (Buttjes 1991: 7). This on the surface appears to counteract any 'learner-centered' philosophy: students should choose on their own what they want to study. But – and this issue will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter – pedagogues should realize that students were in the first instance institutionally convinced, and had no choice *but* to see language as a set of rules and words that needed to be committed to memory. If we (or a minority of us) have seen the error of our ways, we owe it to students likewise to at least *present* them with the argument that culture-learning is a crucial part of language learning, rather than simply surveying their attitudes (e.g. Prodromou 1992) and thus catering to the majority response.

For the language learner who accepts the cultural aspect of communication, the overriding question is: how are the characteristics, values and 'resources' of a culture/society revealed and borne out in day-to-day communicative interaction? To



put it more bluntly the foreign language learner might ask: How is 'culture' supposed to help me speak and interact in and interpret the social and communicative environment in which I find myself?

It would be easy to say that the role and purpose of studying culture is to be problematized only for the student who wants to understand the target culture (for example, the immigrant, the expatriate, the business person, the prospective translator), and who is *already* convinced that culture is the conceptual 'motor' of communication and interaction in general. But the bigger challenge, surely, is to ensure that all learners have the opportunity at least to discover that there is more to language learning than 'learning language'.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Culture and Communication, Content and Expression**

In order to study culture, it is necessary to take a position regarding what is to be dealt with. One must have a '*something*' to study, and therefore be prepared to posit what culture 'is'. The previous chapter provided an outline as to how culture as a pedagogical object has in the main been dealt with in Foreign Language Teaching, where a common procedure is to offer or borrow a definition (as well as acknowledging that there are myriad definitions), and then to suggest how it is to be taught or treated. Yet it is perhaps also because of this very dependency on the need to determine an object of study that the notion of culture is far from resolved, ontologically, epistemologically or analytically, in any of the disciplines that make it their central topic.

The concern in this chapter is to discuss how social theory has problematized the ontology of culture, and how traditional dichotomies between objectivism and subjectivism have been critiqued, and from which other approaches have emerged.

The purpose here is not so much to define culture, but to introduce the theoretical complexities and concepts involved in attempting to seek in culture, however defined, representative answers to questions of behavior, meaning, ideology and so on. Rather than endorse particular approaches then, such as behavioral, functional, cognitive or symbolic (as outlined in chapter 3), this chapter will aim to

outline a number of conceptual tools with which culture can be approached and considered without being objectified and thereby reducing the range of possible questions that objectification necessarily entails.

First, this chapter explores the various theories, conceptions and analytical issues the study of culture presents. It introduces the founding distinctions in social theory, and traces the historical evolution of the concept of culture. The chapter continues by outlining a perspective of social action, of practices within culture, which has attempted to find a third path between traditional dichotomizing analyses, and which understands culture as human activity that is neither absolutely determined, nor free-willed.

Following this, there will be a refocus on language and communication, merging the discussion of culture and its relation to language and meaning by considering (and problematizing) theories of signification. These sections take off from where the limitations of linguistics were outlined (Chapter 1) by problematizing meaning, and how it can be 'located' in contexts of action, discourses and dialogues.

The chapter will conclude with a summary of these discussions with the aim of presenting a number of principles applicable to foreign language pedagogy and which will later contribute to an overall and synthesized framework for both instructional and curricular levels.

Much of the discussion that follows may at first seem to be somewhat removed from the process of language learning, or even culture learning, whether as an epistemological or institutional problem. Indeed, one might be inclined to ask how much, for example, the structure-agency debate has to do with language learning. The topics are essential however. For one, while it is obvious that an *a priori* assumption has been made that a conceptualization of culture, as operationalized here, can explain how collectivities of people 'cohere', and how cultures contribute to the operations of meaning-making, this discussion aims to justify, consolidate

and above all develop not only the argument that culture should be integral part of language learning, but establish one of the three parts of the framework to be developed, which is of course the purpose of this thesis.

#### **4.1 Classical Problems and Issues of the Social Sciences and the Concept of Culture: A History and General Orientation**

The presuppositions of any social theory are the positions a theory takes about the nature of human action and the manner in which plural actions are interrelated (Alexander 1988: 223).

The proposal to analyze and study culture, for whatever purposes, entails the adoption of a theoretical stance. It is a stance which, at least until recently has been taken in relation to a number of fundamental conceptual and philosophical dichotomies that arose in the modernist epoch. Collectively, these dichotomies are often seen as an opposition between micro and macro-system analysis (Alexander 1987; 1988; Mouzelis 1991), within which other problematic issues are discussed.

This section is intended to provide a brief historical orientation as to the intellectual construction and understanding of culture in social theory with particular reference to the main issues that have evolved out of and with the social scientific approach. It could not hope to be more than introductory without undertaking major digression, but it is hoped that this outline will be sufficient to develop a sense of the foundations upon which theory of culture and society has grown, refers to and continues to debate. The main purpose here is to show that the study of culture – even in FLT – involves moves to resolve theoretical problems and issues regarding the object that is to be explained, how, and as always, why and by who, it is to be explained, uncovered or described. It is with the acknowledgement that one *always* and unavoidably has a position regarding the object of study that makes it important to clarify just what the positions are and where they come from.

#### **4.1.1    *The Issue of Content: Idealist versus Materialist Culture***

Marx is both an arbitrary and obvious choice to begin with. While never a sociologist in a strict sense – sociology as an academic discipline didn't exist when he wrote – he is one of social theory's most important contributors and references. Aiming to confront Hegel's idealist notion of *Geist*, or 'spirit of the age', according to which Hegel attributes historical change as based on frustrations of *meaningful* experience of each age, Marx argues that the historical process is not sourced in subjective frustration but in reaction to the 'objective denial of rational interest' (Alexander 1990: 2). Marx claims a 'direct correspondence between the relations of the economic base and the superstructure' (Trend 1995: 11). Thus, for him

the mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness' (Marx 1991 [1859]: 24).

Objective economic and political 'orders' or interests comprise culture, and people respond rationally and strategically to the material conditions they find themselves in and it is therefore the material realities and needs (as well as responses to them) of a social collective – not its symbolic or meaningful structure – that are accessible to methodological analysis (McKenzie 1999: 27). Also known as the 'mechanistic' view, the Marxist perspective sees culture as 'stimuli' to which humans automatically respond, and this has given rise to a social science seeking the predictable and the visible as objects of measurement, and to the construction of models and statistics (Alexander 1990: 2).

Alexander notes that Marxist theory has set the 'terms of the debate' of the sociological project (1990: 3). Sociology has responded to his notion of 'non-autonomous' culture, and continues to frame its discussions in relation to the Marxist paradigm and terminology. Social theory has either attempted to soften the Marxist position and (primarily) reasserted that culture is autonomous, transcending society and determining and ordering the ideological and symbolic – rather than purely rational and practical – behavior, of a defined collective. These 'anti-

Marxist' responses have ranged from functionalist, semiotic, dramaturgic, Weberian and Durkheimian perspectives, as well as attempts to synthesize what were initially offered as opposing approaches. Some of these will be discussed in more detail below.

Weber and Durkheim make up a canonical triad with Marx. More properly 'sociologists', they are often set against each other in similar symbolic and idealist versus materialist and instrumentalist terms. While both analyzed religion as one of their main interests, Weber and Weberians 'conceptualize culture as an internally generated symbolic system that responds to compelling metaphysical needs' (Alexander 1990: 15). Weber suggested that societies were comprised of value spheres, 'realms of truth (theory), morality (practice), and aesthetics (judgment)' (Calhoun 1995: 45) which had to be differentiated. It is through this differentiation that Weber understands how societies maintained rationality and stability.

Durkheim, on the other hand 'asserted the primacy of what he called "the social fact" [that] can be studied in itself without reference to individual psychology' (Friedman 1994: 67). Durkheim defined the social fact as

every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations' (Durkheim 1991/1950: 33).

Although both Weber and Durkheim were interested in the symbolic structure of society, Durkheim's goal was to find a universal, timeless structure and a set of concepts able to explain the social facts of a society. As canonical figures they also represent 'opposing' methodological approaches. For Weber societies and cultures are to be understood through hermeneutic analysis, that is, through interpretation, while for Durkheim structural, quantitative and objective analyses are meant to produce a core understanding of cultural processes.

#### **4.1.2    *The Issue of Determinism: Structure versus Agency***

The materialist-idealist binary is echoed in the structure-agency binary, though its focus is directed more at understanding individual processes and actions in relation to culture. This similar 'either or' proposition is traditionally traced to Descartes' (in)famous epistemological conclusion, *cogito ergo sum*, with which Descartes established 'the *individual's experience* as the yardstick by which to measure the veracity of beliefs, by which to determine the objectivity of knowledge' (Hundert 1989: 14, emphasis in original). The Cartesian version of reality was rebutted by Kant for being 'too subjective' because the thinking subject is too passive (who in turn was rebutted by Hegel, for being 'merely objective', since Kant had to postulate objects as existing transcendentally, independently and inaccessibly beyond our knowledge of them [Hundert 1989]), the dichotomy that emerged revolved around the question as to how much the individual is a product or producer of reality and his/her knowledge of it, that is, whether (and how much) reality was in the mind or in the world beyond one's perceptions. It revolves around the question as to whether or how much an individual has 'free choice' and what might be said to be 'cognitive independence', or 'transcendental rational capacity' (Ashe 1999: 104) from the ordering and structuring power of society.

Fuller (1998) notes the irony that despite naming Marx, Weber, and Durkheim as sociology's founders (that is, scholars of the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century), social theorists did not until the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century 'discover' that the structure-agency opposition was their central problem. Indeed, the structure-agency problem, as old as it is, continues to be notoriously omnipresent in social theory. Echoing for example the nature-nurture debate, it is one that seems to evade any 'solution', or at least one that satisfies anyone for too long.

**4.1.3 *The Issue of Us and Them: The Imperialist Rise and Reflexive Fall of Academe and Anthropology***

Though not directly impinging on methodological concerns to cultural analysis, another important issue that warrants acknowledgment is that of the historical grounds for the concept of culture. Bauman (1992) traces its construction to the modern institutionalization of intellectuals in the seventeenth century, who initiated the 'nurture' versus 'nature' binary. Opting for the former, they simultaneously initiated the modernist character of this concept. Since humans were now considered to have been taught to be what they were, which made possible 'the articulation of a plurality of ways to be human' (Bauman 1992: 3), cultures were abstracted, treated as 'organic totalities' (Pasquinelli 1996) and where ranked in terms of 'developed' and 'less developed', or 'primitive', according, of course, to the definitions the intellectuals had themselves devised.

One major development of the institutionalization of cultural and sociological theorizing was the anthropological project founded by Franz Boas (who took the first chair in anthropology in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century), which arose out of the attempt to understand the primitive cultures that Europeans had colonized. In this anthropological framework, culture came to be considered as an entity transcending the people who possess it, available as a 'kind of text that had its own life and could be studied in itself without reference to the people who practiced it' (Friedman 1994). At roughly the same time in Britain, work was set under way by Tylor to create the first inventory of cultural categories, ranging in topic from cannibalism to language, the most thorough of which, completed in 1938, is 'still used as a guide for cataloguing great masses of worldwide cultural data for cross-cultural surveys' (Bodley 1994).

It is said that it was under Boas that anthropology articulated, or at least further developed, the notion of cultural difference, plurality, and consequently relativity (Pasquinelli 1996). Instead of seeing cultures as separate wholes, each definable within themselves, cultures could not *but* be defined in contrast to other cultures so



that 'each culture needs the existence of the other for its recognition and self-definition' (Pasquinelli 1996: 58): it has been in recognition that the 'anthropological project consists of attributing cultures to others as part of our own self-identification' (Friedman 1994: 71) that anthropology has wrestled with its own construct.

Pasquinelli (1996) identifies three phases in anthropology which have corresponded to three methodological paradigms. In the first, culture was a set of customs that required explanation, in the second patterns that required understanding, and, most recently, culture has come to be seen as a group of meanings that require interpretation (Pasquinelli 1996: 59). It is this final hermeneutic phase perhaps, that makes culture all the more complex when posited as an object of analysis, and brings the intricate dichotomy between visible and 'hidden' culture to relief.

#### ***4.1.4 The Influence of Linguistics: Langue and Parole, Synchronic versus Diachronic***

Of course, the most familiar dichotomy in language pedagogy and linguistics is the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole*, where *langue* is the abstract system of language and *parole* the uses to which the system is put. One of the founders of the structuralist project, Saussure argues that the structure of language 'is determined by laws internal to itself' (Alexander 1990: 8), that people have practically no control over the speech acts they employ (Alexander 1990: 8), and that as such language as a system that transcends use could be analyzed independently from its social manifestations. Saussure thus favors *langue* as a scientifically analyzable object over *parole* and as a synchronic (that is as a system in itself) rather than diachronic (changing over time) system. In short, Saussure holds that language determines the conventions people engage in, and that language is independent from the pressure of its social application: it is a system unto itself.

Saussure's linguistic theory (and linguistics in general) is fundamentally intertwined with and an influence to, sociological theory, and is particularly linked to Durkheim's project. Indeed, it is ironic, considering that linguistic science 'continues to provide a model for the social sciences' (Lecercle 1990: 77) that much of this thesis offers a critique of linguistic dominance using the disciplines it so thoroughly informed. On the other hand, this can be attributed to linguistics' reluctance to critique itself when other disciplines have experienced reflexive crises. At any rate, Finlayson writes that in 'transferring the linguistic model into social science, theorists have introduced a "Trojan horse", which separates the system from its usage (*langue* from *parole*)...and from its social conditions of production' (Finlayson 1999: 58).

#### **4.1.5 Interim Comments and Reflection**

The 'initial dichotomy' (Alexander 1990) in cultural analysis hinges on whether culture is relatively autonomous, that is, an entity that is 'behind' social practices, and in possession of ordering power over meaningful action, or whether, as the Marxist viewpoint argues, culture is reducible to and within 'society', that is, whether culture is everything that one can see, and nothing more. In relation to this, one can speculate whether social actors have 'free will' and rational choice, or whether their actions are culturally constrained, so much so that even the *sense* of free will and free choice is culturally structured. Similarly, a dichotomy has been erected between micro and macro systems and their subsequent analysis. To clarify then, there are two central questions that need addressing: 1) Is culture material, or ideological? 2) Are human actions, practices, behaviors and knowledge determined by culture, or are do they have their source in a self-determined origin?

It seems obvious perhaps that the very fact that we aim to analyze and research culture for the purposes of understanding human interaction already presupposes that culture is autonomous to a degree, has ordering power over the actions of humans and not only that it can account for similarity among groups of people, but

that it can account for the fact that we *see* similarity. That is, by asking questions as to the power of culture over human affairs, one already makes *a priori* presumptions that human actions can be explained by a culture concept, thus implicitly accepting a concept that has been historically and intellectually constructed, and leading consequently to a possible neglect of other explanations that can account for what we see *as* similarity, and *as* difference. This in turn suggests that our knowledge is also cultural.

How deterministic is culture, to the degree that we can make generalizations from instances of human action, or predict instances from generalizations? As learners and analysts do we decide to focus on visible material evidence, or attempt to grasp a greater interpretive subjectivity that is founded in and driven by the cultural system? Can we learn how to communicate with someone from another culture by basing our knowledge on what we see, or is it necessary to attempt to analyze ('intellectualize'), interpret and understand the submerged ideological patterns which inform the way the Other communicates? And how can we be sure that any resulting understanding is coherent with what we are indeed trying to understand? Why should these questions interest the foreign language learner, and how should answering them be of use? Will the classical binaries discussed above set the 'terms of the debate' for the study of culture in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning?

Even foreign language pedagogy must undertake a serious interest in the problems raised by the social sciences, because assumptions with regard to them will inevitably be reflected upon any procedure, approach or method that emerges. How will FLT deal with the problem of ensuring that whole populations are not homogenized by a presentation of 'culture', while at the same time conveying an understanding that individual human action is profoundly influenced by forces beyond the individual? That is, it is necessary to have a position that can at once account for the seeming individuality of people and for the seeming similarity among people.

The parallel between language and culture even as separated objects of study is quite clear. Both *can* be treated as autonomous, transcendent, self-contained, diachronic systems. But if FLT has been accused of doing this – where this treatment is now almost universally acknowledged to have major weaknesses in contributing to the development of communicative competence – then this can alert us to the potential of likewise seeing culture as removed from the processes it occasions.

#### **4.2 Finding a Third Way: Critiquing Classical Culture**

Few fields in the social sciences have remained unchallenged by (predominantly French-led) postmodernist or poststructural critiques. Anthropology, sociology and structural linguistics all have been targeted as fields that have mistakenly depended on conceptualizations of their objects which are altogether too stable, unitary, transparent and free of ontological or epistemological problems. As a result, the social sciences in general have endured an extended period of introversion and crisis as to the purpose they serve, their methodologies, and of course the concepts upon which they are founded. Interestingly (and ultimately more to the point) this has not occurred to any significant degree in applied linguistics, SLA research, or foreign language pedagogy.

In the social sciences however, no less than the very concept of culture itself has been challenged (again, can this be said of applied linguistics or FLT in relation to language?). Bauman writes that the modernist move to define populations in terms of culture

misses the point crucial for the birth of cultural ideology: the perception of diversity *as* culturally induced, of differences *as* cultural differences, of variety *as* man-made and brought about by the teaching/learning process. It was a particular *articulation* of diversity, and not a newly aroused sensitivity to differences, that was the constitutive act of the ideology of culture (Bauman 1992: 3-4 italics in original).

There has been recognition then that the culture-concept was instituted as a result of discussing difference in certain, newly conceived terms, that behavioral and social differences could in a sense be 'explained away' by the concept of culture. In other words, from the moment that difference was cultural, culture defined difference. The anthropological project, seen to have been at the service of imperialism (Hutnyk 2000), was then able to frame groups of people in the terms that were naturalized and essentialized.

First and foremost then, it must be recognized that culture is a historical and intellectual construct, not necessarily a 'natural' category, and it is by understanding culture as such, that critical theory problematizes a resulting process, namely objectification:

Culture is not a real thing, but an abstract and purely analytical notion. It does not cause behaviour, but summarises an abstraction from it, and is thus neither normative nor predictive...The anthropologist's abstraction of a perpetually changing process of meaning-making is replaced by a reified entity that has a definite substantive content and assumes the status of a thing people 'have' or are 'members of'. (Holliday 1999: 242, citing Rothschild)

Because of such reification 'both specialists and non-specialists are prone to talk about "a culture" as if it could be a causative agent...or a conscious being' (Holliday 1999: 242, citing Keesing ). While Holliday notes that reification is not 'in any way a "perversion"...but a natural social process' (Holliday 1999: 242), nonetheless 'after reification, culture appears large and essentialist, and indicates concrete, separate, behaviour-defining ethnic, national and international groups with material permanence and clear boundaries' (Holliday 1999: 242). For this reason Holliday suggests a mezzo analysis which is 'set mid-way between the micro and the macro at the level of the institution' (Holliday 1999: 250).

Theorists take issue with the fact that definitions and delineations of culture turn it into an analytical and comparable monolith. Calhoun writes:

We refer to each [culture] as though it constitutes a single thing to which to determinate reference can be made, rather than a cluster of tensions,

contradictions, and agonisms. Thus we assume that with an appropriate sample, we can compare Japanese culture to Norwegian culture. We take it as given in such studies that the 'culture' can be an object of unitary reference rather than a term needing to be deconstructed. We assume it is something 'out there' to be revealed to us by the responses of a set of individuals, and that the main issue before us is the methodological problem of accurately constituting a 'representative' set of individuals. (Calhoun 1996: 81)

The problem with objectification is that it can overlook – or to frame it more politically, deny and conceal – alternate perspectives, not only to seeking 'answers' but in formulating questions. Calhoun (1995: 143-144) notes that 'objectivists either simply record regularities without explaining them, or reify various analytic notions such as "culture", "structures" or "modes of production" and imagine they exist in the world, external to actors, and constraining them towards regularity'. In an objectivist approach analysts therefore 'presuppose exactly what needs explaining, namely "the similarity of millions of people"' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 218).

A position which acknowledges the interested construction of an object however, observes that this must have methodological consequences and questions the supposedly representative knowledge – the truth – gained from its analysis. It is seen as a methodological problem caught in a vicious circle, because analysis of culture as an object inescapably reinforces its object status:

the more common differential usage of culture cannot escape the essentialism which is its basis. This notion is the product of a relationship between the Western (or other) observer and the people he or she observes. It is inculcated with numerous prefabricated linguistic usages, that those observed are an 'ethnographic object' with definite boundaries, that what goes on within those boundaries can be accounted for by a code of meaning that we have discovered, read, interpreted or whatever – in other words, that there is an objective semantic content corresponding to a given delineated population. All of this is a product of, and contributes to, the institutionalization of culture as objective reality, and the thrust of cultural analysis has been to reinforce this process. (Friedman 1994: 73).

Another issue thereby raised is that culture becomes understood as the meta-concept of human experience, that is, is used analytically to encapsulate all human

experience. In aiming to understand people by referring to their culture, alternative explanatory systems and concepts may be excluded, whereas, as Hundert points out, 'cultures define only a subset of possible groups sharing human characteristics' (Hundert 1989: 309). And even when culture is not referred to as the descriptive and explanatory system, the alternative is likewise often chosen at the expense of others, and social researchers are accused of privileging particular systems over others (the Marxist emphasis on the economic system is called to mind, for example):

theorists falsely generalize from a single variable to the immediate reconstruction of the whole. They have taken one particular system – the economy, the culture, the personality – as action's total environment; they have taken one action mode – invention, typification, or strategization – as encompassing action in itself (Alexander 1988: 328)

Alexander argues that while each of these systems might appropriately be used as objects of independent scientific disciplines, it is unacceptable that any one is accorded privilege in relation to the others.

In the previous section it was seen that the sociological concept of culture, once established, accepted and objectified, has been traditionally presented as involving a choice between (only) two alternatives regarding dimension in terms of individual (micro) and collectivist (macro) perspectives. If you study macro, structural, idealist culture (the argument goes) as a determinative system of all human expression, you are assuming that there are shared transcendental meanings of which actors are not aware (and unable to become aware of), and by which they are controlled; if you study the micro/agentive individual on the other hand, you are left to study actions at the visible, material and often psychological level, assuming that there is nothing that makes actions cohere beyond them<sup>1</sup>. Alexander argues however that any

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<sup>1</sup> Research and theory is doubly critiqued when it *conceptually* reduces the intricate complexity of a culture by looking at it at a macro scale, leading for example, to stereotypification), or *literally* when analysis considers small groups, thereby making generalization difficult. Even then the study of smaller groups can leave itself vulnerable to accusations of reducing their complexity by seeing all of their actors as compliant, so that 'internal dialogicality is erased' (Calhoun 1995: 221). At the same time, it is important to add that, as Berger notes, 'in some academic milieux "reductionism" has become a nearly thoughtless pejorative when it is used in cultural explanation' (Berger 1995: 5).

differentiation between macro and micro scales of analysis are in essence arbitrary and cannot be postulated as 'antagonistic empirical units themselves' (Alexander 1988: 302): 'The terms *micro* and *macro* are completely relativistic. What is macro at one level will be micro at another' (Alexander 1988: 303, emphasis in original). Fuller notes of the structure-agency debate that its most 'pernicious feature...is its reduction of decisions about alternative courses of action to alternative interpretations of the same course of action' (Fuller 1998: 113). That is, that theorists end up seeing and interpreting social and individual actions *only* in terms that the structure-agency debate makes possible. Such theorists accept the dichotomy as essential and existing independently of theoretical constructions of it, thus further legitimizing it, and pursue lines of argument that do not allow for alternate conceptions of action.

Instead of wavering between two positions however, social theorists – and the often dubbed poststructural theory of French scholar Pierre Bourdieu makes a significant contribution here – have attempted to find a third alternative, critiquing both (structural) materialism and idealism, and postulating a conceptualization of social experience to see that 'culture is as much *descriptive* as it is *prescriptive*, existing in a dialectical relationship with lived experience. Culture and experience are informed by each other.' (Trend 1995: 14)

#### **4.2.1 *Alternatives to Classical Dichotomies: Machining Culture***

Critics of the objectivist and determinist view of culture point out that it posits a rigid, wholly mechanical and ultimately ahistorical culture and as such cannot offer accounts of change, or conflict: if all agents within the structure are ideologically and behaviorally determined, and their interests entirely reducible to material interests, then they could not possibly initiate a critique that undermined or changed their own culture (Fuller 1998). In addition, determinist accounts of culture are opposed on the grounds that it means actors cannot be called in to moral account for their actions. But as Berger states, 'In all but the hardest cases, statutes define



responsibility adequately enough, and there are reasonably clear differences between official terror and choices made from a sense of internalized obligation or right. Even the choices we feel we want to make are drawn from the limited range of options affecting that feeling.' (Berger 1995: 6)

Critics of subjectivist view of culture on the other hand, object to the lack of coherence and predictability among groups and societies. Thus, those advancing the sovereignty of agency are challenged for being unable to explain cultural order: 'to maintain an approach to order that is individualistic in a clear, consistent way, a theorist must introduce into a construction a level of openness to contingency that, in the final analysis, makes the understanding of order approximate randomness and complete unpredictability' (Alexander 1988: 224). In other words, the positing of a kind of actor who is free to be and do as he wishes (as does for example Sartre) cannot give an account for the similarity of behaviors and actions among groups of people.

### *Habitus and Practices*

One attempt to seek a 'sensible third path' (Calhoun 1995: 133) between objectivism and subjectivism has been made by Bourdieu who offers us his most central and enduring analytical concept – the habitus. Described as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu 1990: 53), the habitus aims to describe actors as socio-historically embedded in the struggles over culturally objectified interests. It describes how the socio-cultural contexts in which actors live inscribe and condition personal dispositions, tastes (aesthetic as well as more obviously culinary), ideologies, even postures, and stresses therefore that the habitus is 'constituted in practice and is always oriented to practical functions' (Bourdieu 1995: 52). Actors are oriented, and thus orient themselves, to actions, objects, symbols and meanings that have been culturally classified, and which they therefore continue to classify.

Agents spend their lives classifying themselves by the mere fact of appropriating objects that are themselves classified (because they are associated with classes of agents); and also classifying other people who classify themselves by appropriating the objects that they classify. So the classification of the object is part of the object itself. All agents have roughly the same system of classification in their heads (Bourdieu 1993a: 58).

Although Bourdieu emphasizes that the traditional dichotomies of objective versus subjective, individual versus social etc., are flawed in that 'the relation between agent and social world is a relation between two dimensions of the social, not two separate sorts of being' (Calhoun 1995: 144), this should not be interpreted as claiming a mechanistic or deterministic position for culture. This is because perhaps the most significant feature of the *habitus* is that it is generative, not a finite or completed *product* of culture or social engagement, but itself an active mechanism involved in the *process* of cultural reproduction<sup>2</sup>:

Because the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning (Bourdieu 1990: 55).

The emphasis then, is that 'agents act within socially constructed ranges of possibilities, durably inscribed within them...as well as within the social world in which they move' (Calhoun 1995: 144). It is this 'range of possibilities' that mitigates outright cultural determinism, since it is within the social space that actors can strategize, or 'intervene' against the structural cultural model. One can therefore ask 'What is (conceptually) available to an actor in this setting?' or 'What strategies can he or she employ here?' and this localizes interaction and recognizes

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<sup>2</sup> Rogoff (1995) makes the point that the notion of 'internalization' implies a process whereby 'something static is taken across a boundary from the external to the internal' (1995: 151), and prefers the term appropriation to intend a more active and processual meaning. Although Bourdieu often uses the word internalization, it is clear he does not mean to imply such a transfer of static objects.

actor contingency, while simultaneously acknowledging the culturally constructed nature of interaction itself and the interests with which it is constituted to pursue.

How does an actor know what is available for the choosing, or how does an actor know how to strategize and intervene? Calhoun elaborates: strategies of action are 'not discursive...the habitus constitutes a *regulated form of improvisation*, necessary because choice among the available "moves" is never fully specifiable in terms of rules' (Calhoun 1995: 144, emphasis added). That is, choices or possibilities of action are not laid out in front of actors, nor made explicit by an authority or arbiter of action which actors are in a sense trapped into following (in other words, an objectivist position) but rather are made available, and are regulated by the historically acquired, inculcated classificatory and regulatory system of the (limited) social conditions and existence in which the habitus is formed. The habitus itself reduces and limits its own choices because it aims to protect itself from 'crises and critical challenges' (Bourdieu 1990: 61)<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the practical 'choices' one makes and can make are limited to the choices the social reality decrees *as well as* those one allows oneself to make, through 'non-conscious and unwilling avoidance' (Bourdieu 1990: 61), in order to remain in the social milieu within which the habitus is 'created'. Only a limited number of all possible strategies of action are thus recognized – and misrecognized<sup>4</sup>-- by actors.

It is with the habitus thus understood that Bourdieu forwards an analytical perspective towards social practices. The history of practices with which the habitus is formed are internalized, so that durable dispositions are created to be compatible with the objective demands of the practical world: 'the habitus, a product of history,

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<sup>3</sup> I'm not aware of Bourdieu discussing the exchange of cultures, as a result of travel and tourism, and globalization in general as having a profound influence and what is made conceptually available to actors.

<sup>4</sup> 'It is essential to some strategies that they can only be played by people who misrecognize them.' (Calhoun 1995:145) This is because actors do not generally have a 'theoretical attitude' (Calhoun 1995:145) towards their actions and strategies, and they can only be undertaken when their real function is beyond the limits of the actors awareness. Gift giving is a classic example, in which apparent generosity is a means of establishing relations of debt and obligation.

produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history’ (Bourdieu 1990: 54). The habitus is thus linked to what Bourdieu calls ‘practical mastery,’ or an internalized ‘logic of practice’ which enables the actor to perform practices according to the cultural predicates and assumptions without needing them to be constantly made explicit. He argues from this that practices can neither be deduced from present conditions, nor from the past conditions which have produced the habitus; rather, practices can only ‘be accounted for by relating the social conditions in which the *habitus* that generated them was constituted, to the social conditions in which it is implemented’ (Bourdieu 1990: 56). In other words practices should be seen not in terms of being a product of the habitus, but in terms of the relation between the habitus and specific contexts within which people engage in practices (Thompson 1991: 14).

Finally, the habitus is not seen as a uniform product of uniform culture but is based on differentiated society – Bourdieu singles out class as the system of differentiation<sup>5</sup>-- for it is the conditions of the class experience that produce and reproduce similar histories (and thus dispositions, schemes of perception etc.). By this Bourdieu acknowledges that not even two individuals have exactly the same experiences, in the same order, but that members of the same class are more likely to be confronted with the same situations, social demands, objective conditions and practices (Bourdieu 1990: 60).

### *Capital*

Another important concept that describes and explains the processes and practices of cultural production is furnished by the notion of capital. For Bourdieu the social

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson (1991) notes that while many might criticize Bourdieu for overextending the notion of class at the expense of other bases of social division, such as gender or ethnicity, Bourdieu uses it to refer to any ‘sets of agents who occupy similar positions in the social space, and hence possess similar kinds and similar quantities of capital, similar life chances, similar dispositions etc.’ (Thompson 1991: 30). Moreover, this concept of class is a theoretical construct, not real social groups, which the analyst uses to ‘make sense of observable social phenomena’ (Thompson 1991: 30)

world is the 'whole universe of economies, that is, of fields of struggle differing both in the stakes and the scarcities that are generated within them and in the forms of capital deployed in them.' (Bourdieu 1995: 51) Bourdieu therefore expands the economic referent of the term capital and utilizes it to develop the idea that 'the motive force of social life is the pursuit of distinction, profit, power, wealth, etc.' (Calhoun 1995: 141), in terms of different forms of capital, which are the resources people use to pursue capital. Seeing material and economic capital as but one type, Bourdieu includes immaterial types of capital, the most important of which are cultural, social and symbolic, as well as, among others, academic and linguistic.

Briefly, cultural capital is linked to the appreciation of aesthetic principles; it is a form of knowledge, and refers to the ability of the actor to understand, or have an insider's 'sense' of the cultural productions and artifacts of a society, in terms of situating or identifying styles (Cryle 1996). This appreciation of what is often considered 'high culture' is not an inherent product of intellect or sensibility, for example, but is a product of one's social environment. Moreover, an ability to comprehend the logic of art, literature, music and so on goes hand in hand with the legitimization of such art as being superior to other forms.

Symbolic capital is manifested in the form of honor, celebrity and prestige conferred on actors which is seen in terms of the possession of desirable knowledge and recognition. It is the capital accrued from the possession of the other types of capital, and is 'the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate' (Bourdieu, cited in Calhoun 1995: 140)

The struggle over and pursuit of all forms of capital is therefore linked by Bourdieu to the maintenance and establishment of relations of power<sup>6</sup> – notably what

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<sup>6</sup> Not even the arts and literature of a culture (generally taught in the FL class as a benign and transparent range of artistic products) can be seen as free from struggle:

The impetus for change in cultural works – language, art, literature, science, etc. – resides in the struggles that take place in the corresponding fields of production. These struggles, whose goal is the preservation or transformation of the established power relationships in the field of production,

Bourdieu calls symbolic power. Loosely akin to the notion of 'face', but in a dialectical manner and not only in terms of a person's sense of honor, symbolic power bestows upon its possessor respect and authority. But access to capital is generally contingent on the opportunities made available by one's social and class position from birth, since, like economic capital, other forms of capital are unevenly distributed. To be in possession of cultural capital for instance, is generally a result of one's social position – and the habitus that is therefore a product of it.

Moreover, the various forms of capital are not reducible to each other, but can be converted, so that possession of symbolic capital for example, in the form of degrees and awards, can be exchanged for economic capital in the form of well-paid employment.

#### *Fields, Discourses and Systems*

The social contexts in which practices occur, and capital is distributed, are referred to by Bourdieu as 'fields' or, in keeping with the notion of capital, as 'markets'. Defined as 'synchronically...structured spaces or positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analyzed independently of the characteristics of their occupants' (Bourdieu 1993a: 72), Bourdieu argues that fields have universal mechanisms, though they are variably manifested in different fields. Fields are sites of struggle and tension, and the properties fields include, most importantly, the fact that they are defined by specific interests and stakes – the capital that is being sought – which are implicitly agreed upon by the members as worth struggling over in the first place.

French theorist Michel Foucault is regarded as one of the most influential scholars of power, discipline and their (co-)operations in discourses, the conception of which

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obviously have as their effect the preservation or transformation of the structure of the field of works, which are the tools and stakes in these struggles (Bourdieu 1993b: 183).

is similar to that of Bourdieu's notion of field. For Foucault, discourses, or discursive formations, are considered to be 'enunciative fields', seen not to be linked at sentence, proposition or psychological levels, but at the level of statement (1972: 115). Discursive practice for Foucault

must not be confused with the expressive operation by which an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image; nor with the rational activity that may operate in a system of inference; nor with the 'competence' of a speaking subject when he constructs grammatical sentences; it is a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function (Foucault 1972: 117)

Foucault therefore insists that discourse is not limited to language only, as traditionally held, but that it is a '*practice* we impose on things' (Threadgold 2000: 48, emphasis in original); it is the 'will to truth' seen as instituting versions of reality. For this reason, one of Foucault's biggest contributions to discourse analysis is to argue that discourses do not escape dynamics of power in their construction, maintenance and legitimization, but in fact comprise their very possibility. Paralleling to a degree Bourdieu's account of how the habitus is formed, he provides the insight that agents become self-regulators by internalizing the authoritarian, moral and ideological gaze of the dominant discourses:

Discourses make up practical 'grids of specification' (Foucault 1981) for diagramming, classifying, and categorising the subject in the social. These grids are put to work in institutions in ways which generate self-surveillance, wherein the subject internalises the disciplinary and cultural gaze as her or his own. The effect is one of self-colonisation, where the subject takes on 'responsibility' for monitoring her or his morality, discourse, and body (Luke 1992: 111).

The morality of a culture – its ethos – is internalized through the operations of the discursive formation of objects, enunciative modalities, concepts and strategies (Foucault 1972). Drawing on Foucault, Kress also emphasizes the importance of discourses, which provide 'a set possible statements about a given area, and organizes and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about. In that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions' (Kress 1989: 7).

Because Bourdieu can be read as stressing the class system above all others, it is useful briefly to acknowledge that other systems of social organization are available through which practices may be better understood. Geertz (1973) separates culture into six different systems: politics, religion, science, the aesthetic, common sense, and ideology, though he places (like Weber and Durkheim) the greatest emphasis on religion. Yet all of these are operate as discourses and enunciative fields – they frame, institute, legitimize and sanctify practices and behaviors within their realm, so that one can talk (as Bourdieu does) of scientific, or religious habitus for example – habitus which have internalized the logic of the worldviews of these systems of organization. With these systems thus separated – at least conceptually, since daily life does not necessarily distinguish them so neatly – one can move on to consider the operations of cohesion or stabilization within them.

#### **4.2.2    *Elements of Cohesion***

The use of culture as an overarching explanatory concept can conceal the assumptions that must be made in order to sustain its analytical viability:

the concept of culture retains traces of its functionalist origins. It continues to be understood as the articulations of moral consensus and of shared symbols, beliefs, values, ideas. The problem is *not* that the claims are spurious and that nothing is shared. The problem, rather, is that when culture is defined as that which is shared, questions about sharedness – Is it actually shared? To what extent? By whom? How does it come to be shared – disappear by definition (Street 1993: 35).

Nonetheless, as disparate and abstract the notion of culture is, and as difficult (if not impossible) as culture is to analyze without risking the pejorative of ‘reductionist’, the use of the term aims to refer to the way in which human interaction and behavior is (or can be seen to be) patterned. As Kroeber and Kluckhohn write ‘Culture is an abstract description of *trends toward* uniformity in the words, acts, and artifacts of human groups’ (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 182, emphasis added) and can be considered as that which ‘implicitly rejects an explanation in terms of heredity or present situation’ (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 185).



Because of this imperative toward uniformity, 'most of our lives are reasonably predictable.' (Berger 1995: 6)

In order to describe or understand the underlying reasons for such perceived predictability, sociologists and anthropologists have made use of conceptual tools with which to ground or orient their explanations, and there remains a 'core' set which, despite theoretical reservations, and despite the fluctuation in emphasis on each according to which theory dominates sociological discourse at any given time, continue to serve as concepts that can help to describe how groups of people are in a sense 'glued' together.

As long as one is mindful therefore of the theoretical reservations and of the questions and issues concerning the use of the following analytical frames of reference, then one can make use of the more common ones that are operationalized when trying to clarify and verbalize culturally influenced behaviors and meaning-making strategies. It is important therefore that the more traditional notions are acknowledged, and while a number of problems in accepting them outright are indicated below, the following discussion in principle accepts them as *part of a wider approach*, since it is only in 'careless hands' (Waterbury 1993: 66) that they are abused or given too much explanatory power.

#### *Values and Assumptions*

The notion of values, defined most basically as those ideas and practices that cultural members consider to be implicitly good or right, 'has become common parlance in and out of academia' (Waterbury 1993 : 66) and it is one of the most commonly treated analytic concepts in the study of culture. Parsons is most associated with the use of values as a conceptual and analytical tool: 'A culture includes a set of standards. An individual's value-orientation is his commitment to these standards' (Parsons and Shils 1990: 41). In considering the embodiment of values, Bourdieu argues that values are 'postures, gestures, ways of standing,

walking, speaking. The strength of the ethos is a morality made flesh' (Bourdieu 1993a: 86). Fitch instead suggests that the term *premises* better covers the 'those understandings of personhood, relationships, and communication' than is usually intended by 'values', 'beliefs' and 'attitudes' (Fitch 1994: 116), because premises reflects beliefs 'so basic and fundamental to one's understanding of the world that people generally cannot...conceive of how anyone could disagree with them' (Fitch 1994: 116).

As useful as it is however, considerable problems are associated with the notion of values when they are considered for their explanatory potential and are thought to provide causal explanations of social behavior and meaning. A reliance on accepted attributions of another culture's values for example, 'provides apparent "scientific" grounds for ... gross stereotyping' (Waterbury 1993). Moreover, not only can a culture's values be misinterpreted, they can be used as causal explanations for social manifestations:

Houses are in good repair, and the streets are clean in some areas of a city because WASP culture values real property. Houses are run-down, and the streets dirty in other areas of the city because African-American culture does not value real property, but rather showy chattels such as flashy clothes, gold jewelry, and cars festooned with glittery accessories. (Waterbury 1993: 66)

As Waterbury points out however, observations such as these explain nothing and 'apportions to culture a causal burden that it is unable to bear' (Waterbury 1993: 67). Instead, he argues, what is needed is an explanation of the phenomenon itself.

Moreover, the generalization of values implies that they are neatly striated and distributed, and that actors can 'access' them correctly according to appropriate needs. Clearly this misleading view cannot stand, since values 'are not meaningfully connected, they bombard us like a random motley of discords and harmonies' (Turner 1986: 36). Thus a person's sourcing of values is more local and contextual and therefore 'Each value occupies us totally [only] while it prevails.' (Turner 1986: 36)

If everyone in a culture knew all of its values and therefore presumably held to them, how can one explain the actions of individuals who, also knowing them, flout them in some way? How can the value of generosity, for example, be used as an explanation for those people who deliberately behave in such a way as to be considered miserly? Therefore an analysis of a social group's values alone is not sufficient for generating interpretations.

Assumptions are often linked to values. Whereas values refer to what people hold to be right, assumptions refer to what people hold to be universally true or obvious. This applies both to pragmatic actions as well as to conceptualizations and perceptions of them. Clearly an evaluation of the kinds of speech patterns, interactive mannerisms and expectations that are operationalized in face-to-face (and written etc.) communication can be of value in locating the source of some cross-cultural differences.

To make use of the notions of cultural and social values and assumptions then – and one should make use of them – demands that they be used with caution. And when carefully applied, so that it is clear that not all members adhere to the same values or assumptions at the same time and in a unified manner, one needs not only to be able to interpret *what* range of values or assumptions might be operating in a given context, but also, perhaps more importantly, to consider *how* such values are reinforced, managed, and enacted in various practices.

### *Norms and Practices*

As Schneider (1976: 203) points out, 'culture tells actors how to set the scene, and norms tell them how to play the scene.' Norms therefore provide the behavioral and interpretative blueprints for given contexts, and let people conform to what is 'the done thing'.

In terms reminiscent of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, Shotter and Gergen note that

It is pressure to talk in certain ways that makes social life and meanings cohesive: the effective functioning of a group depends upon maintaining a relatively stable way of talking – and members of a group know that and...hold one another to it (Shotter and Gergen 1994: 22).

Thus, communicative norms, like all culturally and socially managed behaviors and ideologies, are actively reinforced and staged. An analysis of how this is achieved can consolidate any interpretation of what is done by actors in given situations.

Practices are comparable to norms and are the activities and actions people perform either ceremoniously or informally in daily life and which are recognizably similar and durable. Geertz holds that the multitude of meanings circulating in any society are organized by ritual public enactments 'which generate and regenerate the very subjectivity they pretend only to display' (Geertz 1973: 451). Berger and Luckmann (1991: 44) write that 'Since everyday life is dominated by the pragmatic motive, recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge limited to pragmatic competence in routine performances, occupies a prominent place in the social stock of knowledge'.

It is this idea of 'ritual' or 'recipe' knowledge, or as others talk of as (person or event) 'schemas' (e.g. Robinson 1988) that can be of interest to the cross-cultural learner. Practices are obviously the most visible – though it does not follow that they necessarily the most 'understandable', aspects of communicative and cultural behaviors and are consequently more amenable to 'direct' observation. An analysis of common ritual practices, especially when related to other explanatory frameworks (for example, how certain practices reinforce values, or how certain practices make a display of capital) can therefore assist in building images of an unfamiliar cultural collective.

*Other Analytical Concepts*

The range of available concepts is of course much larger than those provided above. Having said this, such other concepts are arguably extensions or more detailed versions of those above. So, in order to maximize the range or perspectives one might adopt, a motto of 'the more the merrier' might be suitable. Analyses of such productions as metaphor (e.g. Lakoff's 1980 study is well-known), etiquette, behavioral and physical 'cues' (related of course to context) (Robinson 1988), strategies and emotional expression (since psychological and emotional expressions and reactions are culturally endorsed and sanctioned, accounting for example for the wide variety of acceptable expressions of grief in various cultures) are all viable.

**4.2.3     *Culture as an Object of Analysis: The Story So Far***

It is important to acknowledge that culture, as an analytical and even discursive term is an historical and theoretical construct. This is not to say that culture is a 'wrong' concept, or that because it is (at least seen to be) a Western concept, it is automatically redundant, ethnocentric or inapplicable. The first part of this chapter has aimed to serve as a reminder that it must not necessarily be an accepted fact that 'cultures' exist, and that analysis need not begin from this concept without at least acknowledging that it is an invention, a definition, and that as a scientifically framed concept it has always run the risk of becoming objectified and reduced. Culture, intellectualized, can easily become a way of hypostatizing what it is supposed to understand. This must make foreign language pedagogy vigilant against presenting culture as a list of elements to know, since to explain all actions or practices as being differentiated by culture only is to delimit the analysis of the other prior to analysis itself, and according to only one possible reified system. Thus 'our task must be to remain seriously self-critical about our invocations of essence and identity.' (Calhoun 1995: 204)

It is important also to acknowledge the fact that other organizing systems, fields and discourses such as religious, economic and political discourses play an important part in the practices and perceptions of the groups that are affected by them. While they may often be *implied* by the term 'culture' as a concept within which they are contained, they therefore need to be more overtly considered.

At the same time, despite the level of abstraction the notion of culture entails, it is a highly useful concept for framing the range of practices actors engage in, as well as the range and limits of material, ideological and behavioral choices they can make. One understanding of how culture and its practices can be seen without reducing it to the determinations of one system is forwarded by Bourdieu, whose concepts aim to offer an account of how actors engage in social practices which are at once constituted and reproduced. A summary account of how actors develop what he variously calls 'practical mastery,' or 'feel for the game' might follow like this: from involvement and participation, from birth onwards, in a social and cultural milieu, a person develops a set of dispositions and inclinations to interpret the world and engage in practices which, in order to avoid uncertainty, existential crises or a challenge to the 'collective work of euphemization'<sup>7</sup> (Bourdieu 1990: 110), reinforce and reproduce the objective conditions in which the habitus has developed. In this way a logic of cultural practices is internalized – therefore not needing constantly to be monitored or maintained with explicit or discursive accounts – as are the strategies with which to pursue (though not based on conscious calculation) the legitimized goals and aims and various forms of capital, themselves imbued with meaning distributed along various social positions.

People maintain beliefs, as well as ensure the maintenance of these beliefs, through the production of 'official truth', relations of power and discipline (overt, as well as in the manner Foucault specifies – that is, through ensuring an internal gaze). And

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<sup>7</sup> 'In the work of reproducing established relations – feasts, ceremonies, exchange of gifts, visits or courtesies and, above all, marriages – which is no less vital to the existence of the group than the reproduction of the economic bases of its existence, the labour required to conceal the function of the exchanges is as important as the labour needed to perform this function' (Bourdieu 1990: 112).

because 'the intrinsic difficulty of any explicit statement of the logic of practice is intensified by the obstacle of the whole set of authorized representations in which the group is willing to recognize itself' (Bourdieu 1990: 108), it is important for any analysis of a culture to take into account the materiality, symbols, practices and behaviors by which a culture *represents itself* as well as any attempt to discover its structure, the purpose and machinations of which are kept concealed *by and from* its inhabitants. This means acknowledging what people say of their culture, the images they like to portray, the social obligations they feel they must fulfill, and the stereotypes they have of others, among other issues, *as well* as an analysis which hopes to discover the discursive operations which are not as available through observations and accounts of the culture and society in question. And, although rules are not the primary or only cause which guarantee the reproduction of practices, they too make up part of the analytical landscape:

Inculcation is never so perfect that a society can entirely dispense with all explicit statement... Official representations, which, as well as customary rules, include gnomic poems, sayings, proverbs, every kind of objectification of the schemes of perception and action in words, things or practices... have a dialectical relationship with the dispositions that are expressed through them and which they help to produce and reinforce (Bourdieu 1990: 107-8).

The concepts introduced by the perspective forwarded by Bourdieu are not posited here as the only means of conceiving culture or the tools used analytically to describe it. But they do expand considerably the cultural 'content' in comparison to most current treatments of it in FLT, and are arguably crucial for the development of an understanding of culture that allows analytic purchase and brings to the fore a number of important insights as well as issues that are – despite the complexity of Bourdieu's project as a whole – practical, applicable and transferable to a study of culture in the foreign language class.

One significant concept that has emerged from this discussion is that context is the concept through which an understanding of cultural actions and practices can be developed. Context is the locus at which the past and present and future meet, and

given that context represents the relational dynamics between individual actions, which are regulated by the habitus – itself formed through inscribed and inculcated social histories, and cultural structures – it allows the analyst to see the overlap between the objective and subjective, the mechanistic and individualistic which these terms when considered alone and in isolation could not explain. What people ‘share’ may not be so much the same ‘knowledge’ of their culture, but the strategies with which to pursue sanctified ends and interests, to describe events – according to the field or system ‘in play’ at the time: contexts generate and manifest these strategies. In other words, with context it is possible to see the production and reproduction of cultural systems in practical forms. It is not only through the analysis of ‘cultural grammar’, that is the rules of practice and behavior of which actors themselves do not have transcendent or pure discursive knowledge that culture becomes manifest, but in the practical activities in which people engage and struggle to obtain, maintain reinforce their positions that culture is understood.

Subsumed under context then are other important issues, all of which are interrelated. To focus on practices for example, necessarily raises awareness of the various societies and groupings, such as classes, ethnic groups or gender (bearing in mind that they too are sites of struggle between official and subversive interests), and not just of an overarching Culture that is expected to represent unified interests, meanings and perspectives. And all of these must be understood in terms of the conflictive dynamics within and across them. To become aware of the various forms of capital in a given class or group, and to investigate how they are acquired, distributed, exchanged and emphasized is to make an effort toward developing an understanding of the kinds of relations and practices among actors both within and across classes. And all of these operations must be seen as involved in struggles, tensions and pressures through which they are sanctioned, legitimized, and seen as being worthy enough of struggling over.

While Kramsch too emphasizes struggles – and has even been criticized for privileging or romanticizing conflict and struggle (see section 3.6), she does not



stress these dynamics as being inherent and permanent feature of all cultural (re) production and practices. Individuals only struggle against dominant discourses when aiming to be subversive, and the rest of the time they appear to be satisfied and consenting, when in fact meaning production depends inexorably on these tensions that practices reveal as well as conceal. After all, one needs to strategize in order to successfully play the communicative game.

There are of course criticisms of Bourdieu. Calhoun (1995) for example, addresses the question as to how universal (or, in contrast how French/European) Bourdieu's conceptual tools are, or whether they must be adapted to suit various cross-cultural contexts. He also argues that Bourdieu's account sees too much homology among actors across fields, that is, that Bourdieu does not conceive of actors inhabiting various fields simultaneously. Bouveresse (1999) contends that despite the attempt to resolve the objectivist-subjectivist deadlock, Bourdieu essentially holds an objectivist position, that he suggests that we could 'understand society better if only we could really find a way of seeing the social machinery in action' (Bouveresse 1999: 62), when, contends Bouveresse, no such machinery exists.

Nonetheless, to accept the conceptual tools and terminology of Bourdieu in general terms<sup>8</sup> gives the analyst initial purchase to develop an understanding of a target culture as practices and as processes and production rather than as a monolithically conceived, paradigmatically complete 'unicity' (Lyotard 1984) that is unchanging and driven either by a single mechanism, or alternatively, a mass of individual choices and contingencies. It provides the analyst with a conceptual framework with which to address what is an eminently vital part of cultural (re)production: agents learn and acquire the abilities and habits to make evaluations and attributions. The very nature of socialization is that it is 'learning to typify within

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<sup>8</sup> 'General' because it is necessary to bear in mind that the field in which this is intended to be applied in is foreign language teaching, not sociology. While it is not necessary to agree entirely with the position that we should not expect teachers or learners to have sociological expertise (e.g. Kane 1991 - an issue to be discussed later), it is important to acknowledge the practical limitations of institutional language learning - at least as they are currently

the framework provided by one's particular world' (Alexander 1988: 313). We categorize ourselves and other people in relation to ourselves in the terms of (for example) education, employment, income and class, as well as according to the practices the logic of which is mastered only by ourselves. It is not therefore the actual reality of 'the' content – that people from culture X possess Y attributes, but that they are defined in relation to others in terms which classes relationally construct and enact. It is not the 'concrete' distribution of capital but the relational value to ideologically determined categories that needs explaining, as well as always, the practices through which this is (re)produced. It is what each class (or the people who identify with it) generally perceives the other to be. In this way, culture is nothing but representations (as opposed to pure realities), and of interest is what and how these representations are produced, reinforced, legitimized.

To complete this section a number of analytical questions can be offered as a summary of what foreign culture pedagogy, and ultimately learners might find useful from this all too brief exploration of social theoretical issues - though they serve only as examples of the orientation that has been discussed:

1. How are groups of people within the target culture classified across and within various positions and hierarchies?
2. What do people from various positions want, in terms of various types of capital?
3. What do they do to get it? How do they perform the rituals and strategies in order to get it?
4. How is the availability of desired things distributed?
5. What are the objects and discursive statements that circulate among different groups with regard to them?
6. In what ways are the objects and the conditions in which they are circulated created, legitimized, spoken of and reinforced as worthy of being wanted, pursued and struggled over, and circulated?

7. *How* are the values and assumptions of a collective regenerated and dispersed?
8. What are the rituals and recipes for action? What ceremonies and typifications are most regularly observed within given groups? How are they justified by them?
9. What behaviors are sanctioned and made official, or alternatively, how is their transgression punished and condemned?
10. What are people's obligations, both ceremonially and 'informally', and how are they reproduced (through statements, practices etc.), maintained, spoken about and distributed?
11. What are distinct practices associated with, or could be better explained by other systems – such as economic, educative or religious, rather than 'cultural'?

### **4.3 Culture, Language and Meaning**

Culture is an important system (or conglomerate of systems) with which the behaviors and practices, values and assumptions, and perceptions of social actors can be seen as organized as well as interpreted and explained. Language is a (highly privileged) system within the cultural system, with which these actions are affected and effected, transmitted and likewise organized and made possible. Since the concern here is to analyze how to treat culture as an integral part of foreign language pedagogy, it is necessary to aim towards an understanding of how the two relate to each other in ways that would inform the learner's evolution in the semiotic and semantic realm of target culture practices and communication. In the following sections therefore, attention will be paid to the question of meaning, its operations and the ways it is 'constructed'.

#### **4.3.1    *The Whorf-Sapir Legacy***

The work carried out in sociolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking goes a long way toward establishing a positive correlation between language and culture<sup>9</sup>; many interactions follow routine linguistic as well as behavioral patterns, and proverbs, idioms and expressions for example, reflect cultural perceptions, values and morals, at least at the discursive level.

Based on the awareness that language performs a primary function in social organization, scholars have also speculated as to the degree of influence language has on cognition. Perhaps the most celebrated and controversial stance regarding the link between language, culture and human perception was forwarded by Sapir and Whorf. The variously named Sapir-Whorf, Whorf-Sapir, or Whorfian hypothesis holds that languages determine the cognitive and perceptual structures of the speakers who use them. Through his research of Native American cultures, Whorf felt that he illustrated that

language produces an organization of experience. We are inclined to think of language simply as a technique of expression, not to realize that language first of all is a classification and arrangement of the stream of sensory experience which results in a certain world order, a certain segment of the world that is easily expressible by the type of symbolic means that language employs. (Whorf 1956: 55, cited by Zhifang 2002: 163)

For Whorf, any given language ‘conceals a metaphysics’ (cited by Zhifang 2002: 163), that is, delimits the perceptual and cognitive parameters of its speakers. (As an example, Zhifang suggests that in English the words ‘reality,’ ‘substance,’ ‘matter,’ ‘cause,’ ‘property,’ ‘space,’ and ‘time’ among others are the metaphysical categories of Anglo Saxons [2002: 164]). Because he argued that languages and cultures are equally legitimate in describing reality, the notion of linguistic relativity derives largely from this theory, which holds that there are no

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<sup>9</sup> Sapir for example is right however in pointing out that ‘all attempts to connect particular types of linguistic morphology with certain correlated stages of cultural development are vain. Rightly understood, such correlations are rubbish’ (Sapir 1921/1978: 219).

transcendental criteria with which to evaluate the superiority of one description over another.

The Whorfian position, interpreted in its 'strong' version as holding to linguistic determinism, continues to court controversy and debate. Critics feel that Whorf and Sapir are wrong in their determination to find in the formal properties of language a direct correspondence with meaning, allowing them to remove the sentence, utterance, word and so on from its context and from

*whatever role it might have been playing...* It only remains to suggest that language can be investigated for the principles of storage and organisation, and cognitive theories and systems of language are established. The role of language as activity is consequently buried. (Lee 1991: 210-11, emphasis in original).

The emphasis that language constitutes cognitive categories is thus dismissed on the basis that the modeling of these categories relies on rule-bound systematization which cannot explain how these rules themselves came to be constructed. Thus Friedman writes of a concrete example:

It is one thing to be able to isolate the correspondence between the 'time is money' metaphor and our capitalist society. It is another thing altogether to understand the process by which it comes to be *experientially* relevant to members of all classes. This experiential substrate is...the source of cultural production (Friedman 1994: 76, emphasis added).

With linguistic determinism moreover, problems arise when, by privileging culture as the only system able to explain human communication and action, one is unable to resolve the problem of 'same language different culture' conditions, such as those that exist between the various 'Englishes' of say, the United States, England and Australia: one cannot ignore the fact that regardless of some linguistic variations (much more of course at phonetic and vocabulary levels than at the structural level), members of these nations and cultures do communicate in the same language, despite often differing perceptions, values and assumptions, practices, symbols, histories and conditions.

Therefore even if, 'to a large degree, the argument has become one of how strong a version of the Whorf hypothesis is credible' (Fasold 1990: 53), the argument of linguistic determinism is clearly rooted in and reflects the same conceptual chicken-egg ultimatums as those of cultural determinism, and the mechanistic-subjective dichotomies as already discussed. In this version analysis relies on a purely linguistic model rather than a cultural model. Thus, the response to it can be similar: rather than argue that communication is rule-governed and determined by abstract systems, it might be better to realize that 'co-participants make available and visible the nature of their activities in the very course of their production. They achieve an understanding of action from the very scenes in which they are engaged.' (Lee 1991: 217)

In this way it is not controversial to conclude that language, as a part of the discourses, fields and practices in which one is an actor (and in conjunction with one's habitus), circumscribes and significantly delimits the range of available ways of understanding (or talking about) things and reality. But this need not imply that language and perception are reducible to each other. And when this is acknowledged the 'object' of interest is the operations and conditions of this delimitation as regulated by people themselves. That is, linguistic reality, like behavioral reality must be seen in terms of the conditions of its production, in practices.

Language is thus one of the co-systems which people create to facilitate meaning and reality construction, but it does not generate all classification of reality. Culture would neither exist nor operate without meaning, nor meaning without systematized efforts, one of which is the use of language, stabilizing it. However, this does not imply that the meaning which is largely facilitated by language-as-system is problem free and transparent, and indeed reveals a source of difficulty which problematizes the pedagogical project of language teaching.

#### **4.3.2 Meaningful Play**

Saussure provided the insight that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary (1986). He made the distinction between *langue*, a self-contained and autonomous system of linguistic conventions, and *parole*, which is the individual and local expression of language in speech situations, as performed by speakers and hearers. Attending to *langue*, Saussure argued that it should be studied synchronically, as it is at any given time, rather than diachronically as a historically changing and contextually contingent system. Moreover, for Saussure, signs in a language are characterized by 'negative' difference, which refers to the notion that the meaning of any sign can only be defined in relation to other signs, and in terms of what they are not: a tree is not a flower, a dog is not a cat. This is the essence of linguistic structuralism, which holds that language (and consequently social life and culture) can be studied as a system of signs independent of their variable application.

The various branches of linguistics and the social sciences, which took their cue from this new-found structural integrity of the linguistic system, have been criticized for the assumed degree of social independence and determinative power with which language and culture have been attributed. And even though language is seen as a system operating through relations of difference internal to itself, language considered as a whole is still seen to represent reality as 'fact-stating' (Lee 1991: 200). This results in the assumption that the examination of this autonomous language can reveal a society's 'corresponding ideas or thought objects' (Lee 1991: 200) (obviously paralleling with the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis).

Semioticians and linguists make the distinction between types or levels of meaning. In chapter 2 it was seen how Widdowson distinguishes between systemic and schematic meaning, which roughly correspond to linguistic knowledge and procedural, logical or common sense knowledge, respectively. Also discussed as the difference between denotative and connotative meaning, reference and sense, content and expression, and dictionary and encyclopedia meaning (e.g. Eco 1986),

as well as of course, signified and signifier, there has long been an awareness that the sign involves more than the naming or pointing out of objects, or of having 'surface and apparent' meaning (Allan 1998: 34), and subsequently that meaning is a result of operations beyond pure reference. It is of course the relation – the difference – between the two binary terms that provide the central problematic of meaning in communication, and an exploration as to how it has been perceived in some theoretical circles is warranted.

*Differance, Trace and Sign: The Relation between Denotation and Connotation*

One figure in critiquing linguistic structuralism specifically (where Bourdieu for example critiques social scientific structuralism) is Derrida, who aims to understand the implications of Saussurian structuralist theory (Lechte 1994). As a philosopher, Derrida's project has been to challenge the conceptual foundations of Western philosophic thought, and in one of his earliest analyses he targets linguistics, deconstructing what he identifies as 'logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence as the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire' (1976: 49) for a transcendental signified. Derrida (1976: 33) sees Western philosophy and science (discourses out of which structural linguistics arose) as being sustained by systems of binary oppositions that philosophers and scientists themselves inaugurated and hypostatized. Yet these dichotomies, he argues, are instituted by privileging one term or concept at the expense of its supposed opposite, though the privileged concept in fact *depends* on the occluded one to create the conditions for its conceptual existence. It is this process of occlusion that creates the illusion of 'presence', which is the metaphysical conceptualization of things 'being there' (or 'being' *per se*), and which supports the possibility of the notions of substance, existence, the temporal presence of the moment, the 'self-presence of the cogito,' and consciousness and intentionality, among others (Derrida 1976: 12). To simplify, Derrida argues that the ideas, concepts and referents that we discuss have only been made possible through other ideas being violently eliminated, as it were,



though these expelled ideas are the requirement for those we do have and consider to exist autonomously.

With this theory Derrida (1976) launches a critique against the division between speech and writing, as described by Saussure. Focusing on speech, Derrida points to the assumption of purity between intention and expression and finds a dependence on the presence of meaning in the supposed 'intimate link between sound and sense, an inward and immediate realisation of meaning which yields itself up without reserve to perfect, transparent understanding' (Norris 1991: 28). In other words, Saussurian structural linguistics is seen to hold to the idea that meanings/references are a simple and *causal* product of the phonological system of a language. Writing on the other hand, is seen to be no more than a graphic portrayal of the phonology of a language, seen to unproblematically represent and be at the service of the spoken word, which unproblematically (even if arbitrarily) represents the ideas and objects to which it (speech) refers.

However, Derrida argues that for representation to be somewhere 'absolute and irreducible' the signified has to exist transcendentally (Derrida 1976: 20). This is a proposition he aims to refute. For Derrida the signified is itself a product of 'arche-writing', a concept he employs to show that speech itself depends on *a priori* meaning-making. Arche-writing is not limited to written and graphic text therefore, but is the system of operations which make meaning construction possible in the primary instance – it is 'writing' as the excluded pole of meaning-making. It is therefore, neither reducible to the linguistic system, nor is it possible for it to be an object of analysis (Derrida 1976: 57, 60). Rather, it is the 'movement of differance' (1976: 60) which presents the *condition* of meaning. Derrida can thus argue that the reference, the 'thing itself' is 'always already a *representamen*' (Derrida 1976: 49 emphasis in original), or '*always already in the position of the signifier*' (Derrida 1976: 73 emphasis in original).

Whereas Saussure describes *difference*, Derrida talks of *differance*<sup>10</sup> – a contraction of the notions of difference and deference, in French – to point out that not only are signs definable solely by their difference from other signs, but that, as a consequence, signs must always defer to other signs *ad infinitum*. In this way signs can only ever leave ‘traces’ of themselves, and can never be wholly present to themselves: the moment a sign ‘appears’ it ‘disappears’ through the process of deferring to other signs for its (in a sense) validation. Derrida (1976: 7) can thus propose that: ‘there is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language’. For him therefore, language is:

a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside the system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (Derrida 1978: 110)

The implication of this is that if signs operate through *differance*, and if the signified is itself ‘always already’ a sign, then all meaning – all meaningful social reality – is a product of signification and signifying practices. This character of signification is possible only through a process of interpretation which by necessity requires an interpretant (Eco 1986: 24). If meaning is characterized by *differance*, it is because Derrida understands the distinction between sound and sense not to be intimately and causally linked, but to be essentially one and the same thing: ‘the difference between signified and signifier is *nothing*’ (Derrida 1976: 23). This is what in fact ensures the play of the sign, because as a consequence of arche-writing, the ‘thing itself’ as a sign must also be interpreted. The signifier (expression/sense/connotative meaning etc.) is not representative of the signified

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<sup>10</sup> The original version is of course *différance*. However, in the translated edition from which these quotes have been taken it has been translated as it appears here. Incidentally, Derrida points to the inability to distinguish difference/*differance* in spoken pronunciation as an example of the inadequacy of speech as the primary system of meaning production.

(content/reference/connotative meaning etc.), because the signified is already part of the system of difference.

Derrida does not however, contrary to many interpretations, say that things do not exist (or for that matter make Sapir-Whorf like claims), but that signifying practices constrain the *conditions* that give rise to the way things are understood, mean and come into conceptual being. Thus: 'from the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs' (Derrida 1976: 50 emphasis in original). Consequentially, in the absence of the transcendental signified meaning is engaged infinitely in a state of limitless play: meaning 'is never identical with itself; because a sign appears in different contexts it is never absolutely the same' (Sarup 1993: 34).

### *The Rhizome*

Deleuze and Guattari share many of Derrida's convictions regarding signification, though with different, perhaps more concrete (though equally challenging) vocabulary. One concept and metaphor that concretizes the play of meaning is that of the rhizome, which is a central part of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. Biologically defined as a 'thick horizontal underground stem of plants...whose buds develop into new plants' (Collins Dictionary 1986), Deleuze and Guattari elaborate and apply these properties in several philosophical areas, including signification. Both in nature and in Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual arsenal, the rhizome contrasts with the tree on many levels: the tree is linear, filial, genealogical, binary, unitary, hierarchical and originary; rhizomes operate according to principles of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, unpredictability, alliance and anti-genealogicality (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 7-25).

And so it is too with thought, meaning, interpretation and signification. The rhizome of meaning – the sign – connects to other signs, though without order or prediction. There is no centre whence it originates, no beginning, nor end:

not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 7)

Like the principle of trace, rhizomes are constantly fleeing and 'deterritorializing' in lines of flight; they cannot be contained or segmented because they will always escape and take up on an old line or a new line (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 9). In short, the sign cannot be segmented or binarized by arborescent thought, but for it to be meaningful must be left to keep its fickleness and unpredictable connectivity.

Concentrating on the content-expression dichotomy, they also hold that 'content is not a signified nor expression a signifier' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 91). They rely on the concept of the 'abstract machine', or 'assemblage' – which appears similar to Derrida's arche-writing – and which is used to undermine the linguistic dependence on a linearity between content and expression. Expression, they argue, does not uncover or represent content (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 88), though expression does have power to react on content 'in an active way' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 89). The thesis they advance is that semiotics cannot rely on linguistic 'postulates' of the sign, but must directly link to pragmatics and 'nonlinguistic factors'.

It is not enough to take into account the signified, or even the referent, because the very notions of signification and reference are bound up with a supposedly autonomous and constant structure. There is no use in constructing a semantics, or even recognizing a certain validity to pragmatics, if they are still pretreated by a phonological or syntactical machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 91)

A proper assemblage of meaning, they argue, when pragmatics and other non-linguistic considerations are rightfully linked to it, can no longer be thought of as operating in binary systems, or as a linear system, but is 'diagrammatic and superlinear' and is coherent with 'the rhizome model' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 91). There is not only a circularity of signs therefore, but a 'multiplicity of circles or

chains' of signs (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 113)<sup>11</sup>. Again, meaning is not contained by language, meaning is not a simple matter of presence: an infinite range of indeterminate and indeterminable variables provide the conditions of meaning production.

With the autonomy of language thus undermined, Deleuze and Guattari identify in the face the location for the operation and stabilization of meaning, since the face defines 'zones of subjectivity' and expression. The face 'constructs the wall that the signifier needs in order to bounce off of' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 168). Subjectivity, faces, expressions, therefore are fundamental operations in communication:

it is absurd to believe that language as such can convey a message. A language is always embedded in the faces that announce its statements and ballast them in relation to the signifiers in progress and subjects concerned (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 179).

Thus, language *per se* doesn't do or convey anything, but rather requires the element of expression, the face, to achieve meaning.

#### *Other Operations of Meaning: Affect Meaning, Allusion, Metaphor*

In addition to denotative and connotative meaning, Allan (1998) adds a third category: affect-meaning. For him affect-meaning refers to the emotional impact of a sign or discourse. He sees affect-meaning as having been a neglected but important consideration in cultural analysis 'because it draws attention to the emotional component of culture that produces the general motivation that people feel, that creates group boundaries, and produces a sense of "facticity" about culture' (Allan 1998: 38). Though ultimately in accord with poststructural theory, he critiques it for overly concentrating on culture and his solution is to infuse analysis with a micro-level understanding of reality, and for this reason the

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<sup>11</sup> Because signs are 'chained' the play of meaning is not confined to units such as words or sentences, but extends to texts. Texts too are always referring to other texts, and this is known as intertextuality.

emotional element, he argues, requires more attention. However, he is careful to distinguish between individualistic emotional experience and 'the level of emotional energy that any specific part of culture can elicit from individuals or collectives and thus the symbol's degree of impact' (Allan 1998: 39).

Allusions and metaphors too are important operations of meaning, and which illustrate the culturally differentiated pertinence of referents. One classic study (Lakoff 1980) sees metaphor as fundamentally constitutional of the way cultures describe and understand reality. As Eco (1986: 87) notes 'to speak of metaphor...means to speak of rhetorical activity in all its complexity'. But the metaphor would be of no use to analysts he adds, if it can be explained 'wholly within the scope of a semantics of denotation' (Eco 1986: 89). Rather, the metaphor must be seen as an 'additive, not substitutive, instrument of knowledge' (Eco 1986: 89). Allusions also represent an example of connotation that should not be considered substitutive. Cross-referencing any and every facet of a culture's (or even the world's) artistic and social products, events and practices, and used in virtually all media and channels of communication<sup>12</sup>, allusions require a 'reasonably educated', in other words socialized, (adult) person.

#### **4.3.3 *Dialogism***

Also in many ways complementary to Derrida's deconstructive approach is Bakhtin's<sup>13</sup> notion of dialogicality. Bakhtin describes the characteristics of utterance and speech as being pivotal in the construction, in dialogue, of the self, existence and meaning through social relations. In other words, Bakhtin fuses a theory the construction of self with a semiotic description of the social. With this outlook he, like Derrida, challenges the linguistic (again, predominantly Saussure's)

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<sup>12</sup> Allusions may refer to a personally shared history too, but then one might expect that it is more easily recognized.

<sup>13</sup> With work dating back to the 1920s and 30s, Bakhtin in fact considerably pre-dates the poststructuralist emergence of the 1960s and 70s. His work however was translated from Russian, and thus widely available to Western European academia, at around this time and is for this reason (though unfairly) seen as 'complementary' rather than precursive.

depiction of language as being accounted for by synchronic and autonomous analysis. Also like Derrida, he denies the possibility of pure presence, and of a dependence on a 'center' (transcendental signified) from which understanding emerges. For Bakhtin nothing can exist in itself, since it depends on a contrast with something else for it to become known. In short, his prevailing argument is that meaning, or the self is

relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying *simultaneous but different* space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (Holquist 1990: 20-21, emphasis in original).

Dialogism<sup>14</sup> is thus a theory that posits the necessity of dialogue between interlocutors for meaning, any notion of self, and perception to emerge, and, through the process of differentiation, these concepts can only emerge in contrast to something else, an Other. And meaning is that which enables (what Derrida describes as the illusion of) presence, since 'something *exists* only if it *means*' (Holquist 1990: 49, emphasis in original). This need not imply that reality construction is driven towards a Hegelian state of a single consciousness or goal however (Holquist 1990: 24), since reality is always contested in dialogue, stemming from its 'necessary *multiplicity* in human perception' (Holquist 1990: 22, emphasis in original).

Dialogue, writes Holquist (1990: 38), 'is composed of an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two. It is the relation that is the most important of the three, for without it the other two would have no meaning'. An elaboration of Bakhtin's vision of language in communication based on these terms is thus warranted.

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<sup>14</sup> Dialogism is a term Bakhtin never used (Holquist 1990: 15). The principle of dialogue however, is the dominant concept of his theoretical perspective throughout his career and for this reason has been so dubbed.

### *The Utterance*

Because Bakhtin so stresses the social – dialogic – construction of meaning and self, it comes as no surprise that he sees communication as the proper site for the study of language. Utterances and speech acts are what characterize language in its rightful domain – they are the ‘real units’ of speech communication (Bakhtin 1986: 71):

One does not exchange sentences any more than one exchanges words (in the strict linguistic sense) or phrases. One exchanges utterances that are constructed from words, phrases, and sentences. And an utterance can be constructed both from one sentence and from one word...but this does not transform a language unit into a unit of speech communication (Bakhtin 1986: 75)

For Bakhtin the utterance is constituted by important features that transcend its linguistic objectification (or neutrality, in a political sense), and which determine the style and composition of a speech genre<sup>15</sup>: referentiality, expression, addressivity and response.

### *Referentiality*

Time and space are central in Bakhtin’s vision of the dialogic process, for these are the dimensions which create (the structure of) an event, within which of course occur speech acts and utterances. Time and space provide the coordinates with which the self is constituted, being obviously different to another’s coordinates. An utterance does not exist in isolation but possesses a semantic content that refers to a position, a coordinate, of a speaker. Whereas the word or the sentence belongs to nobody, an utterance belongs to someone, that is, has an author. It is the author, therefore, located in what Bakhtin (1986: 84) calls a ‘referentially semantic content’, by which he means theme, or a plan, that determines the linguistic and generic character of an utterance.

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<sup>15</sup> Speech genres are very similar to what have already been discussed as discourses and fields, and for this reason have not been elaborated in this section. For the record however, Bakhtin sees a speech genre as ‘each sphere in which language is used [and] develops its own *relatively stable types* of...utterances’ (1986: 60, emphasis in original )



*Expressiveness*

With the comment that 'there can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance' (Bakhtin 1986: 84), we return to the emotional and evaluative (and political) characteristics of meaningful communication, and this is what Bakhtin refers to as the expressive aspect of an utterance. When communicating, people intone, express, evaluate and display their emotions, so that while these idiosyncrasies do not inhere in the system of language per se, the utterance is constituted by and constitutes them.

An expression is thus the local and individual application of neutral, dictionary-defined words, phrases and sentences. This does not however attribute the speaker with autonomous agency, since socialization, or continuous and constant interaction with others shapes and constrains the range of one's own utterances. Bakhtin (1986: 89) therefore sees speech as an '*assimilation* – more or less creative – of others' words'. Nonetheless, an utterance is individually expressive because it is applied to 'a particular actual reality under particular real conditions of speech communication' (Bakhtin 1986: 86).

*Addressivity and Response*

Dialogue by necessity requires speakers and hearers, addressers and addressees, who co-create speech genres and meanings. An utterance is distinct from a sentence because an utterance 'belongs' to someone who expresses it and who has a referential semantic with regard to it. But this expression is directed to someone (or thing); it is addressed to someone who may be immediately present or distant, individual or group, like-minded or opposing, subordinate or superior, concrete or imagined. Speakers must therefore take into account the addressee of an utterance as well as imagine the effect of the utterance. This is known as the addressivity of an utterance and its characteristics also combine to influence the constitution of an utterance.

An utterance however, 'can never fully be understood or explained if its thematic content is all that is taken into account...[it] always *responds*...towards others' utterances' (Bakhtin 1986: 92 emphasis in original). Utterances are therefore always in response to prior utterances, previous events or meanings. This is necessarily so because utterances only occur when there is a possibility of a change in speaking subjects, a 'rejoinder of dialogue'. The sentence can be characterized as being a complete thought, but it is not correlated 'directly or personally with the extraverbal context of reality' (Bakhtin 1986: 73). An utterance on the other hand, is oriented as a response to another: a sentence can be comprehensible, but because it can refer to itself<sup>16</sup> is not necessarily meaningful. The utterance however is meaningful because it is engaged in dialogue, it is simultaneously addressing someone or thing, and in response to someone or thing.

#### **4.3.4 Political Language**

Poststructuralism has always been interested in – some might say has fetishized – power, which is seen not only to be part of, but to constitute discourses, interactions and even knowledge. Differance and dialogism, as has been shown, both see the construction of meaning as violent and contested, automatically implicating therefore the unavoidably political nature of language and its practice. It might at any rate be seen as a logical consequence of the fact that social life and practices are characterized by conflicts and interests, so that Bourdieu (1991: 66) too can write: 'it is rare in everyday life for language to function as a pure instrument of communication'. Lyotard is more forceful. The first principle of communication, as he sees it, is that 'to speak is to fight' (Lyotard 1984: 11). And following on from this, the second principle is that 'the observable social bond is composed of language "moves"' (Lyotard 1984: 11). In order to understand social relations therefore, analysts do not only need a theory of communication, 'but a theory of games which accepts agonistics as a founding principle' (Lyotard 1984: 16).

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<sup>16</sup> A sentence can be spoken or written solely to illustrate the properties of sentence for example, in this way referring to itself.

Even at the linguistic level proper Deleuze and Guattari argue that the basic element of language is the 'order word', that even 'a rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 76). And to strategize, to argue or hold one's position, to have the right to speak and be listened to, and to ensure the 'presentation and maintenance' of one's uniqueness (Fitch 1994: 120) at the level of utterance and interaction, all involve politics, so that

order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a "social obligation." Every statement displays this link, directly or indirectly. Questions, promises, are order-words (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 79)

Is it not the case that when one asks a question one is obliging one to respond? When one speaks one is saying – ordering, 'listen'. (Given this obligation to listen one might think the notion of the order-word applies only to speech. However, even though one can 'silence' a written text by closing it, reading it is listening to argument, to evaluation; to read is to obey the demands of discursive or generic patterns and features of a text.)

Utterances cannot be considered as functional tools only, since it is impossible to divorce meaning from evaluation and judgement, both in use and interpretation. The linguistic form

exists for the speaker only in the context of specific utterances, exists, consequently, only in a specific ideological context. In actuality we never say or hear *words*, we say and hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on. *Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behavior or ideology* (Volosinov 1973: 70 emphasis in original).

An important feature of power moreover, is that it is not unilateral, exerting itself in the direction from powerful to oppressed. The dialogical perspective ensures that power is always and everywhere present and emergent in (communicative) practice: 'Power is not a structural system lurking *behind* ideological practice. It is emergent *in* the practice of communicating as people invite others to respond from various

positions' (Lannamann 1994: 141, emphasis in original). Power is fundamentally a practical part therefore of 'sustaining or undermining our stance toward others' (Hall 1995: 209), and not only a possession of someone 'invested' with power as a result of social position etc. Power is neither intrinsic to texts, nor something 'which is carried about in people's heads' (Luke 1994: 133). Instead it is a 'social relation of knowledge and practice' (Luke 1994: 133), which Foucault argues, constrains meaning (Gottdiener 1995).

The point to be taken from this is that foreign language pedagogy must also observe 'how thoroughly politics works language from within, causing not only the vocabulary but also the structure and all of the phrasal elements to vary as the order-words change' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 83). Yet arguably FLT all too often presents language as having a transparent function, as evidenced by grammar translation, functional/notional methodology, and even in methods developed with the oft repeated 'language as conduit' metaphor in mind. But it is vital that we recall that *people* communicate, not language: 'there is no faceless communication' and subsequently, 'there is no non-hierarchical communication' (Scollon and Scollon 1995: 49). Understanding therefore requires not only perception of words, but a *simultaneous* interpretation as to how these words are used evaluatively in a social sphere and situation.

#### ***4.3.5 Implications of Differance and Dialogism in Foreign Language Learning***

The most important task of course is to understand the implications of Derrida's theory of the sign to the field of foreign language teaching. In other fields its concepts of reality, and the role of language in its structuring, are commonly misunderstood and therefore charged (with frequent indignation) with leading to a radical and unsubstantiated relativism. This may account for the lack of interest from (applied) linguistics and language pedagogy, both disciplines the interests of which are to scientifically study, describe and thus by necessity control language,

which the Saussurian autonomous linguistic structure, as a 'transparent medium' (Sarup 1993: 37) allows them to do, and for which therefore the notion of eternally deferred semantic absence is unacceptable and unworkable.

It may indeed be fair to say that on the one hand we need not make too much of the notion of the free play of the signifier when it is applied to language teaching, since one aim for the learner is to have communicative mastery which in itself does not often recognize the *inherent* instability of meaning in social circulation, or rather, which makes considerable efforts to disguise this feature. That is, despite operations of difference, speakers can and do manage to live practical lives using styles and communication with which they are familiar and without constantly suffering the anxiety of ambiguity which Derridaian theory can suggest, because there are conditions and characteristics of speech (and writing) which provide an illusion of stabilizing (but not freezing) play.

On the other hand however, it is important to recognize that there are some ramifications, especially in the pedagogical setting, which need to be taken into account in any developing framework or approach. Thus, whatever one makes of the notion of arche-writing for example, Derrida's exploration of a system of meaning production that is never present alerts us to the fact that communication cannot be entirely accessed or controlled through analysis of the linguist's scientifically defined, autonomous, synchronic language. Not only Derrida's but other critiques of structural linguistics make the point that some linguistic operations are beyond linguistics proper, and by implication, beyond the scope of pedagogy. As Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 140) note, signifying regimes<sup>17</sup> are 'simultaneously more and less than language'.

Because trace, and therefore absence, is the 'source' of sense, there is neither beginning nor end in meaning – no 'absolute origin of sense in general' (Derrida 1976: 65) – and this must have some follow-on implications with regard to the

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<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari define a regime of signs as 'any specific formalization of expression' (1988: 111).

linearly conceived and executed linguistic curriculum. Learners do not and cannot begin a language 'from scratch', not only because they have already been socialized by one arche-writing, because meaning is already part of their existence, but also because there is no conceivable 'from scratch' whence to begin. Time and place (for example the first class of a semester) may indicate an official beginning of systematic instruction, but this cannot be confused with the highly differentiated, execution of dialogue, the heterogeneity of speech genres.

When foreign language teaching talks of 'meaning' therefore, it is invariably relying on a 'simple' denotative relation between signifier and signified – a claim easily substantiated by the existence of vocabulary lists, many of which presume direct correspondence in linguistic and more importantly connotative and evaluative terms from one language to another. Of course one could not deny that an important part of learning another language is the development of vocabulary of references which are 'simple', concrete and (therefore presumably) transparent. Yet at another level the notions of difference and absence, connotation and dialogism, of intertextuality and of the rhizome, as well as of affect meaning are useful primarily and crucially for the recognition that pedagogical representation does not arrest the inherent tendency for meaning to escape in the interpretative process. Meanings are not only horizontally deferred across 'words', but also vertically and dimensionally. They connect 'any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 21); they float into other planes and levels of abstraction - cultural, social, psychological, affective and even unknown. Providing 'the' meaning of a text – as tied to a fixed and stable referent - is in pedagogical practice reduced to, thought to be contained by and sufficiently explained through linguistic categories, thereby curtailing the possibility of its establishing relations spreading out in various, multiple, connotative directions. The upshot of this for SLA is that the espousal of content which provides 'comprehensible input' simplifies the process whereby learners are supposed to 'comprehend' the meaning of a text or conversation. Accepting this simplification, researchers tend to focus on problems of input (Faerch and Kasper 1987; see also

Gass and Madden 1985; Krashen 1981; 1982), when in fact they should be questioning their notion of what is comprehensible, and how it becomes so. Indeed, 'little consideration is given to comprehension processes as such' (Faerch and Kasper 1987: 261).

With dialogism it is possible to see the potentially infinite play of the signifier that is linked to the signifieds of a cultural system. That is, language as a system is linked to/embedded in/described by/descriptive of culture by the encyclopedic or rhizomatic associations that language as the operations of difference and trace make possible. Chains of signs – utterances – link language to society, interaction to culture, people to each other, because addressivity and expressivity are made possible only by others whose presence we must take into account when speaking and writing. As Bakhtin notes above, the word or the sentence can be, but are by no means necessarily automatically, utterances, and this suggests that one is not necessarily ready to communicate when one is equipped with a range of words and sentences. Communication then, is the ability to make utterances that fit into the ongoing conversation of context and culture. A conversation between two is dialogue, not two separate monologues occurring simultaneously but autonomously. Thus, despite its apparent obviousness the following must be stressed: communication must be linked to human interaction, to co-construction of practice, meaning, discourse and so on. It is the human factor that must be managed in conversation, and the human factor that manages conversation and dialogue.

#### **4.3.6 *Finding Stability: Context***

Management, and therefore by extension semantic stability, is a key notion when addressing how speakers do in fact 'make sense' to and of one another (relatively speaking of course), despite the signifier's evasiveness. Discourses and fields represent the historically and spatially constituted loci or coordinates within which actors can manage their interactions. To these terms a third can be added – context – to which we return from a previous discussion in more detail. Indeed, context is a

ubiquitous and constitutive feature of all communication, so pervasive that 'the opposition between a 'contextual interpretation' and one that is not contextual is entirely spurious...The problem is always, what kind of context?' (Asad 1986: 151). Volosinov (1973: 95) too argues that communication cannot 'be understood and explained outside of...connection with a concrete situation'.

Though the majority of the social sciences, from linguistics to anthropology, and all their branches and even SLA scholars are aware that context is a centralizing and focal part of meaning-making, there is frequently a significant divergence in how they define it and apply it, and because of this recourse to the notion of context is not as simple as it may at first suggest. It is only natural that varying research paradigms will attempt to outline various the levels and contents of what organizes context. For this reason, the main question concerns what is or should be meant by 'context' when it is addressed in FLT?

### *Features and Types of Context*

It is possible to go into considerable detail as to what features context possesses, and a number of texts are regarded as seminal, including those of Bakhtin and Volosinov, as well as Bateson (1972), Malinowski (1923), Firth (1959), Goffman (1974) and Hymes (1972) among others. The following is intended to summarize features of context that are applicable to – and would expand the generally current concept and use of context in – FLT.

*Context is more than text.* It is known that context provides the clues to words only partly perceived. That is, hearers, contrary to more traditional beliefs where hearers simply 'record' words, have to actively construct them, using contextual clues to complete utterances when they could have only in part genuinely heard them (Aitchison 1994: 84). Research has shown not only that individual words are completed according to most likely or 'obvious' choice, but that fuller utterances are completed in the absence of some key words. In the first case for example,



hearers (listening to audio tapes) presented with ambiguous initial [k] and [g] sounds 'heard' the correct word by relying on the final stem: *iss* or *ift* (Aitchison 1994: 84, citing Ganong 1980), while in the second case hearers completed sequences according to what the surrounding words implied: 'paint the fence and the ?ate' was completed by *gate*, 'check the calendar and the ?ate' was completed by *date*, and so on (Aitchison 1994: 84, citing Garnes and Bond 1980).

What emerges as most significant however, is not that context clarifies ambiguity in terms of surrounding words, but that wider contextual knowledge is needed to complete utterances. Hearers need awareness of greater social and cultural practices to be able to match gates with fences, calendars and dates. Though appearing logical and common sense, even such simple examples refer to background knowledge and practical logic that is culturally embedded. Goodwin and Duranti note

when the issue of context is raised it is typically argued that the focal event cannot be properly understood, interpreted appropriately, or described in a relevant fashion, unless one looks beyond the event itself to other phenomena (for example cultural setting, speech situation, shared background assumptions) within which the event is embedded, or alternatively that features of the talk itself invoke particular background assumptions relevant to the organization of subsequent interaction (1992: 3)

Clearly, the ethnographic and anthropological understanding of context considerably expands the conditions in which meaning is operationalized. Context is not limited to the material text (or the recording and transcription of what is/was said) but is seen in light of the surrounding social environment in which an interaction has taken place. Meaning is interpreted as a result of actors understanding the setting, the conditions of dialogue and the practice/s in which they are engaged. The 'action' is as, if not more significant than, the words used, 'for it is in action that meaning may become' (Anderson 1996: 57). Like the sign, context refers to regimes beyond linguistic code:

Meaning is only secondarily what the words say literally and logically. At bottom, it is what the circumstances say, in other words – and outside

words... Every meaning encounter conveys an implicit presupposition which more or less takes the form of a parenthetical imperative. One whispered by an inhuman agency that borrows for a moment a pair of lips (Massumi 1992: 31).

*Field, Tenor, Mode. SPEAKING.* Halliday (1989) borrows from Malinowski (1923) the notions of context of situation and context of culture (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 47). The context of situation refers to the environment in which meaning exchange occurs. Halliday sub-divides context of situation into three elements: field tenor and mode of discourse. The *field* of discourse considers the nature of the interaction, 'what the participants are engaged in,' while the *tenor* of discourse refers to who is taking part in terms of status, roles and relationships among participants. The *mode* finally refers to 'what part the language is playing' and what participants expect the language to do for them (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 12), such as persuade, convince, deceive, inform and so on. Halliday feels that an analysis of an interaction using these categorizations can 'characterize the nature' of a text or context, and moreover, that it is universally applicable (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 13)

Hymes (1972) introduces a similar description of context in a mnemonic acronym: SPEAKING. It stands for settings, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms and genres. Some of these are relatively self-explanatory, while others require elaboration. *Ends* refers to the purposes of a speech event in terms of outcomes and goals, *act sequences* is an amalgam of message form and message content, and refers to the 'syntactic structure' of a speech act, *key* refers to tone, manner or spirit in which the event is conducted, *instrumentalities* combines two variables regarding the speaker's form of speech, namely dialect and register, *norms* also combines the notion of norm of interaction and norms of interpretation, and covers areas such as body language and distance, turn-taking, hesitation behavior and so on. Hymes (1972: 64) also sees that norms of interpretation 'implicate the belief system of a community'. In short, though Hymes's conceptualization of context, or even social language behavior has been criticized

(see section 2.3), the features of context here outlined illustrate a number of considerations significantly augmented from the kind of textual analysis that considers only its internal ostensibly self-contained features.

*Context is Indeterminable and/but a Site of Inference.* Derrida (1976: 70) writes: 'If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation in space] and an historical strategy'. Clearly, this refers to discourse and context. Indeed, Derrida's thesis relies on the notion of discourses and the contexts in which they are manifested as being the conditions that produce the *appearance* of stability. As Finlayson writes:

discourses produce an apparent necessity to meaning, they make things look natural and obvious, but such necessity or objectivity emerges only within a discursive structure. Indeed, discursive structures may be understood as attempts to fix meaning and to obscure contingency' (Finlayson 1999: 64).

In other words, contexts are not inherently meaningful or stable, but are operations themselves which create the appearance of stability.

The conditions that make contexts functionally possible however, are their very indeterminability. Referring to Derrida, Colebrook and McHoul (1996: 434 emphasis in original) write that 'meaning is only possible through determinacy and it is the very particular, local, conventional and purposive character of determination which renders contexts other than *absolutely* determinable'. Contexts are characterized by their potential to be reiterated – the very notion of context is founded on a recognition that many interactions appear very similar – but at the same time each context is local, particular and purposive in its own right: no two contexts can ever be historically or spatially the same, and for this reason 'alteration always accompanies repetition' (Lucy 1995: 25). It is therefore no contradiction to say that 'nothing can be said or done that *cannot* be taken 'out' of context' (Lucy 1995: 25 emphasis added), and that nothing can be said or done out of context, since any decontextualization merely transfers contexts.

Contexts therefore only provide the conditions that enable meaning to be *inferred* rather than governed. As Lucy writes:

the management of this inference is crucial to the preservation, maintenance, and continuation of things as they are – institutionally, socially, politically, ethically, legally, aesthetically, philosophically. No doubt such management is carried out by individuals...but it is also and primarily enacted by the *contexts* in which signature-effects, or inferred intentional events, occur (Lucy 1995: 44).

This is consistent with Eco, who argues that the free play of the connotative signified is constrained in relation to a semantic field, a context: if not, all meanings would inhere in all texts (Gottdiener 1995) and it would not be possible to come to any agreement at all. Context is thus a concomitant, contingent and historical cause of meaning and its inference. Actors do not interpret meanings from texts, or from what is said, but manage inferences based on practical, referential, perspectivist, relevant and salient associations that conform or contrast to historical events. The fact that contexts are not 'absolutely determinable' due to their reiterability means that any attempt to stabilize them with determinate, normative rules is necessarily reductive and ultimately meaningless and asocial.

*High and Low Context.* Though context is inseparable from meaning at the interactive level – and since context is more than text, Hall (1976) makes a distinction between high and low context, which refer to the degree of explicitness of information and coding in given interactions. In high context transactions (and cultures) the material and physical environment is pre-coded or pre-programmed in the situation itself, requiring little information as to how the situation is to be interpreted or enacted: in a sense everyone already knows their place and their function. In lower-level contexts speakers are not guided by the explicitly established *modus operandi*, and must therefore work to set practical, behavioral, political and semantic standards of the context.

Although Hall notes that 'the more that lies behind [a person's] actions (the higher the context), the less he can tell you' (Hall 1976: 116), it follows from his description that high context situations, once identified, are more amenable to analysis in terms of strategies, meanings (at least official), and practices, since they are more standardized and less contingent on individual actions. On the other hand, even low context situations need strategies by which hermeneutic and behavioral norms become established, and these too could be analyzed.

*The Need for Vigilance: Pitfalls and Limits of Context Dependence for Analysis*

Context does not solve all problems of signification and meaning. While it should be given considerably more emphasis in FLT, care should be taken so that it does not limit cultural or communicative analysis to the features of context that some scholars have defined. Though it powerfully guides interpretation, it does not determine it, and that which gives contexts the power to make meaning appear stable is not due to their own stability. It is important to recognize therefore that contexts cannot be analyzed as isolated units of action any more than sentences can<sup>18</sup>. Firstly then, the inherent indeterminability of contexts mitigates against a dependence on context for absolutizing any explanation of meaning. Actors appeal to context for relevancy, appropriacy and conventionality when attempting to determine the purposiveness of an utterance:

But if the context is only determined purposively then the limitation of context is *already* an interested act (even if mutually agreed upon or implicit). The very

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<sup>18</sup> Consider transcripts for example, which focus only on the audible or visible aspects of an interaction. They can never hope to capture the whole context in that it's past and future (i.e. consequences, either aimed for or arbitrary) are, in this format, invisible. Transcripts record what was said, perhaps even how it was said, but they cannot account for the reason for the utterance in terms of the individual's priority, mood, goal etc.

A transcript wants to generalize from this context, without considering whether a person's utterance (for example an opinion on relationships) is shaded by a prior interaction (an argument with one's partner) and future goal (to affect the listener's attitude, or even be recorded by a socio-linguist).

character of that determination – *as* practical and interested, indeed pragmatic – means that the context can always be opened – to other interest and purposes (Colebrook and McHoul 1996: 435 emphasis in original)

Colebrook and McHoul (1996: 438) also note that contexts are ‘formally uncodifiable’, but it is this formal uncodifiability what creates the conditions for purposive and more specific meanings. In other words, while contexts are characterized by their potential to be reiterated, the meanings that arise from contexts are specific to the particular conditions of each context. A context changes its semantic shape when it is reflected upon by a ‘native-like’ speaker and by a learner who approaches it ‘after the fact’, ‘from another angle’ and with other purposes. In short, rather than aiming to present general laws of context to somehow enable their future production and comprehension, comprehensibility may be better served and ensured by creating conditions for local and immediate *contextualization* in real time. That is, conditions need to be met whereby learners *make* contexts, not only analyze them.

The notion of context in fact raises a catch-22 situation for the learner, in that for one to be able to function in a context, one needs to be able to recognize it and interpret it beforehand (Fairclough 1992: 82). Context and language are dialogic processes, and are mutually constitutive: not only does context organize speech, but speech organizes context (Goodwin and Duranti 1992: 8). In order to understand an action or utterance therefore, the learner needs an understanding of the context, which, paradoxically is in many cases more easily understood with a knowledge of the language. What is necessary however is not an increased devotion to the linguistic system then, but a means to analyze the cultural conditions which give rise to various contexts.

There is also a problem with analyzing the features of context according to characteristics described by scholars. Although sociolinguists study talk in context,

the notion of context remains problematic because its possible ingredients appear limitless ...rather than developing a set of rules for conversational organisation, what emerges is a list of possible relevancies for the analyst to take account of when studying any given conversational extract (Lee 1991: 206; see also Lavandera 1988: 7).

The problem with this of course, is that the list of relevancies may be, or perhaps necessarily are entirely arbitrary: the signifying chain of references, routes that meanings have taken 'to get to a context' are untraceable. Thus, while positing itself as an objective revelation of *the* meaning of a conversation, it is in fact a ready-made list of things to look for, rather than things to be discovered. Indeed it is easy to argue that the relevant features of a context can *never* be fixed. This leaves one asking who is to define and set the limits and relevant features of a particular context? With what authority? Are learners expected to carry a checklist of features to take into account? How are these features supposed to be recognized and determined?

#### *Context in Linguistics and in FLT*

Linguistics is often accused of extracting context out of specific interaction, that it isolates context 'as a self-contained entity' (Goodwin and Duranti 1992: 11). Thus 'the kind of "context" that usually interest applied linguists often pulls up short of contextual issues that go beyond language itself [and which can leave one with] a rather impoverished conception of context if we cash it out only in cultural matters that can be expressed in language' (Corson 1997: 181).

Similarly in FLT, context is more often carried out at the sentence level. Such is the case in Mondria and Wit-De Boer (1991) for example, whose experiment sets out to test learner retention of vocabulary based on readings of single sentences. When they conclude that 'guessability', but not retention, is aided and improved by context (Mondria and Wit-De Boer 1991: 262), it seems by now obvious that this is because learners have had no means to contextualize the utterances involved in social and pragmatic terms – there has been no opportunity to connect meaning to a

larger conceptual territory than the sentence. A fear of objectifying language in linguistic terms for pedagogical consumption is thus warranted, as it first reduces the complexity of communication by describing only 'elements' rather than dynamics of it, and secondly, because such reduction is atemporal, apolitical and perhaps most importantly asocial (and thus impersonal).

Another problem with relying on context is that, in FLT it leads to simplification and the erroneous belief that if learners role-play particular contexts, such as buying shoes, going to a restaurant etc, then these will be clarified and understood, seen to be rule-governed in real conditions. In this way, context is again reduced to the kinds of phrases, that is language one might employ in a given pre-ordained situation. This understanding of context is fundamentally limited and consequently its treatment is mishandled. Arguably, this mishandling inhibits, rather than creates, conditions for the personal and critical acquisition of cultural history and space.

#### *An Operational Understanding of Context for FLT*

With the above characteristics of and issues concerning context in mind it is possible to outline not so much a definition but an approach to the analysis of context in the foreign language teaching and learning context. Contexts therefore are a constitutive part of wider discourses – they are the cogs of discourse – as well as being each time a local version of the discourse. That is, contexts are history localized and social spaces forged out of historical precedent. Thus, while 'contextualization conventions function...to serve as guide posts for monitoring the progress of conversational interaction' (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982: 18) they are not the sole determinative factors of understanding that emerges from interaction.

Instead, one must consider the cultural system and discursive conditions which give rise to contexts, as well as the features such as field tenor and mode within them.



Contexts are equally behavioral and practical as well as textual, and involve relations of power in their establishment and expression.

Though contexts are identifiable (and this means one must make sure contexts are correctly identified if they are to be analyzed) because similar situations give rise to similar contextual expression, they are not solely determinative of meaning or interpretations and therefore should not be considered as sources of rule-bound or procedural description: contexts share features and patterns, but not necessarily fixed procedures.

When identifying context, a useful guideline would be to consider the degree of contextualization in an interaction or event in terms of high or low. High contexts can be more safely considered as amenable to normative description, while low contexts can be considered in terms of strategies that are operationalized in order to establish a degree of semantic and behavioral stability.

Applegate and Sypher (1988: 49-50, 59) outline a constructivist perspective of the relation between language, communication and culture, and argue that communication is a pragmatic and goal-centered<sup>19</sup> activity, though actors are not always aware of their goals, and that cultures 'define the logic of communication'. Contexts provide the opportunity to synchronize and establish communicative goals and are visible in conventional interactions. They argue that the 'influence of culture on communication is most evident in situations in which conventional goals and plans are "given" to actors' (Applegate and Sypher 1988: 59). While one might accept Fitch's argument that sociolinguistic research overemphasizes the goal-oriented nature of communication, and that 'it is often insinuated that all communication behaviour, or at least all that is worth studying, is of that nature' (Fitch 1994: 110), Applegate and Sypher do conceive of a number of questions worth asking that illustrate the culture/context/communication link: 'What goals of

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<sup>19</sup> There are a number of categories of goals: identity, relational and instrumental

action are most valued by the culture? Are goals differentially valued across social/institutional contexts within the culture? What types of strategies are deemed most appropriate for the accomplishment of particular goals?' (Applegate and Sypher 1988: 51).

#### **4.4 Summary: Making Culture Meaningful**

We turn to culture to find explanations of social action and interaction. Yet culture is an ideological and analytical construct that has attracted a considerable range of perspectives, definitions, concepts and methodological approaches. And there is danger in hoping that culture can serve them as an *uhr*-concept that can explain all there is to be explained. As Kroeber and Kluckhohn modestly summarize:

anthropologists do not claim that culture provides a complete explanation of human behavior, merely that there is a cultural element in most human behavior, and that certain things in behavior make most sense when seen through culture (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 186).

There are also sub-fields of cultural analysis – and linguistics is one of them – that focus on a particularly delineated aspect of culture, and this in turn raises questions of considering or substituting parts for the whole, privilege, objectification, the relations between variously differentiated systems (e.g. 'language' and 'culture'), and whose interests, decisions or approaches concerning them they serve.

This chapter has attempted to outline one conceptual approach to the analysis of culture, and to determine the relevancy of the culture-concept in understanding the communicative event. The answer to the question 'what is meant when we argue for the study of culture in FLT?' is that we ought *to analyze what informs the production and interpretation of communicative events, discourses, practices and descriptions of reality*. One can agree with Zhifang therefore, who states that 'to learn a foreign language is to study a different ontology' (Zhifang 2002: 169).

#### **4.4.1 Principles for the Study of Culture**

The main points of this chapter, which may serve as the first set of principles for the developing framework, can be annotated thus:

1. Human interaction is influenced by and can be explained by various organizing systems. 'Culture' can be used as an umbrella term that includes religious, economical, political etc. systems, but these can not be 'swallowed' up by it as an omnipotent and ubiquitous object or determinative entity.
2. Social life involves the creation and imposition of constraints and pressures, recognized or not, explicit and implicit, on the ways of acting, behaving, interpreting and perceiving.
3. Human social organization is produced and reproduced by practices, the logic of which actors internalize.
4. Cultural practices and behaviors, and therefore language (or better, dialects), is characterized by political motives and dynamics at virtually all interactive levels, whether conscious and strategic, or as a result of internalized and legitimized constructions of social interests and play for capital.
5. Not all meaning-making or understanding is amenable to discursive or rule-bound description. Not all rules can be written (based on an assumption that they can then be followed), because a large, undeterminable portion of a society's practices *escape* the urge to be represented as synchronic, structured and internally coherent wholes.
6. Contexts provide locations of analysis when they are properly treated as being informed by wider discourses, and are not limited to textual production (in the traditional, not Derridaian sense).
7. The sentence must be transformed into an expressive utterance. In this way meaning is personalized and historicized and located; interaction and dialogue is created and there are genuine communicative stakes which the speaker must take into account.
8. Expression and content are inseparable in contexts of action. Therefore expression must be interwoven with content for an analysis of meaning.

One of the most important ways to conceptualize culture, as a number of scholars including Bourdieu, Deleuze and Guattari and Bakhtin realize, is that culture is process rather than a product, or as Street (1993) puts it, that culture is a verb (not a noun). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Bogard similarly writes that 'society is not *a* machine, but *to* machine – precisely, to machine bodies into subjects and objects' (Bogard 2000: 270-71). It is by seeing culture as constant production and process, and communication as contextualized, contested and socially constructed that allows pedagogues and learners alike to avoid objectified and content-driven description of the target culture and language.

The notion of appropriating the 'utterances of others' is another significant means to conceive of how operations of social meanings become dialogically part of one's personal trajectory within culture. For this reason Fitch sees cultural analysis as 'a process of capturing the thread of the ongoing conversation rather than the discovery of "the" social system' (Fitch 1994: 117, citing Rosaldo 1989). One must learn not the objects of culture (only), but how they are spoken of (rhetorically, connotatively and affectively); one must learn not what to say, but how to respond and how to address. No utterance or practice is original, nor originary, because it has to relate to prior practice in order for it to be recognized as an utterance. Models of communication should therefore be sought in the strategic productions of others, not in the infinite range of possible sentences a language can construct. Thus, we might also 're-vocabularize' the problematic of foreign language pedagogy by considering its task as being that of *language socialization*, rather than language teaching or learning.

Culture is not constructed by one 'builder': there is no one site from which the forces that constrain meaning, descriptions of reality, morality, values and behaviors originate; instead, various sites, each of which may have similar but often also competing interests, have a hand in representing reality. The media, the government, the family and the church for example, can be seen to share issues, but may operationalized different or even opposing interests and values in describing

and dealing with them. Seeing them as different discourses allows the analyst to separate these fields, perspectives and interests, ensuring in turn the inability to stereotype en masse the practices and ideology of the target culture.

The argument which questions the possibility of transcendental objectivity of reality should not be equated with a position which endorses a relativism in which nothing is more salient or significant than anything else. On the contrary, it is not necessary to be concerned with *absolutely* relative cultural worlds: meanings and practices find *approximate* stability through a reduction in the range of interpretative and practical possibilities within given fields. A significant amount of such reduction takes place in context, which represents a temporal and spatial 'condensation' of culture's generative patterns. But it is simultaneously important to recognize that while contexts are excellent events to observe and analyze, they do not inherently reveal the conditions of their production, and this too must be of analytical interest.

#### **4.4.2     *Culture and Foreign Language Learning***

To study culture is not necessarily to learn the language, just as much as to study language is not necessarily to learn to communicate. But to learn to communicate, it is necessary to understand not how 'language' and 'culture' interact, but how *people* interact within the constraints and spaces that their languages and cultural fields and systems make available.

The question that naturally arises following the problematization of culture as an analytic object is: what is the upshot of all this in the FLT setting? First, while defining culture will and should continue to be contested in FLT, consensus is growing that culture is more than the 'three (or four) F's'<sup>20</sup> or more than a nation's literature. This is one reason the aim in this chapter has been to understand culture

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<sup>20</sup> If many scholars dismiss the 'four F's' this does not mean that the four F's are of no use. Social 'facts' such as these are of course a part of culture. Scholars who critique these approaches may be interpreted not as suggesting that they should be eliminated outright as objects of study, but that there is so much more that warrants closer study than heretofore has been acknowledged.

as meaning-making and as practices, since the student of FL and FC is interested in (communicative) action, and how it can be understood, and ultimately how one can develop from these understandings an ability to interact in ways that are coherent for both the native and the foreigner. The learner thus needs to look toward both action and the environments that structure and contain them.

Accepting Bourdieu's argument that dominant ideologies institute and legitimize ways of communicating, and, following this, that there is no 'pure' or 'correct' language system but only speech communities and contexts in which different ways of speaking are manifested, suggests that attempts to teach abstract, pure, correct language is not only teaching a language emptied of social context, not only uncritically promoting dominant agendas, but might in fact be teaching a non-existing form of communicating. One is always in a speech community, the members of which establish, reproduce and recognize particular strategies, meanings and (codes of) conduct. This includes, for example, speakers of two languages communicating in a third, as is a common case of business persons communicating in English.

Grammar translation and the audio-lingual method in foreign language teaching is concerned with enabling the learner to perceive what is uttered. Vocabulary lists, pronunciation exercises and the study of syntax are all predicated on the idea that if the learner can produce them and perceive them that communication will be successful. Yet one implication of this chapter is that the perception of language does not precede comprehension at a social level. Knowing what is said gives no real indication of what is meant and, secondly, what is meant – as far as it is possible to say exactly what you mean (which is doubtful) – largely influences what is said and how it is said.

It was this problematized view of meaning production that gave rise to Communicative Language Teaching. Yet in many ways CLT did not know what it was getting itself into. If the goal for teachers and learners of a foreign language is

the comprehension and production of socially intelligible meaning, then there is little reason – it was argued – in treating language as an autonomous, fixed and neutral structure, as the linguistic paradigm is wont to do. CLT replaced this with a set of functional and instrumental phrases conceived as representing communication, or language in use. But this was not enough. First, there must be recognition that communication is a process of sense-meaning (connotation) and affect-meaning, and even indeterminate meaning; it involves strategies, interests, politics, behavioral norms; it involves bodies inhabiting social spaces, not just theoretical interactions. Second, because people, not languages, create meanings, meaning is *pragmatically* as well as linguistically stabilized (but not fixed).

‘Communication’ is therefore an activity that overlaps language and culture, not language and language function, and represents the site where the two systems blend. It is a concept that ensures that language and culture are not seen as binary oppositions, as either/or objects of analysis. Communicative Language Teaching in many ways began to ask and attempted to address this issue, but it did so with its perspective still deeply embedded in the linguistic paradigm. In CLT, culture, though not strictly reduced to language, was restricted to being a site in which only language ‘functioned’, that is, in a perfunctory sense, as a code of transmission, in effect undervaluing both communication and culture.

None of these observations are intended to provide the sole perspective of culture or cross-cultural interaction. Learners will still want to have a functional, pragmatic ability with which they are able to order a meal or ask directions. But these interactions are no longer seen as solely functions of a code, whereby two humans adopt rather robotic mannerisms without a human, physical, emotional, political element: what is the relationship you can expect to develop with a waiter? How would you recognize a rude waiter from one doing his job in an entirely normal and normative way?

*Methodological Issues: Content.* As in all aspects of pedagogy, variables such as age, level, development, motive, material access and location all compound the problem of CIFE learning. Whether the aim is to cater to these variables or to do 'as best as is possible' despite them, culture as pedagogical content continually runs the risk of being objectified, hypostatized, reductive and general. It is for this reason that perhaps finding the 'right' content to present is not the key. Rather it is the means to analyze *any* content systematically that is more fruitful.

Methodological approaches that aim for a description and analysis of culture have been outlined, and were (initially) framed in terms of binaries in which a choice has to be made. Does this imply that language learners likewise have to choose their perspective? Are learners to be presented with a choice between, say a Marxist position, or a semiotic approach? In many ways the answer is 'no', but it needs to be qualified immediately by adding that this is in fact not a ridiculous position. It may not be necessary for the language learner to be acquainted with Marx's *Capital* or Bourdieu's *Distinction*, but any study of culture requires that the analyst not only has a perspective, but is *aware* of it. Learners who approach the target culture with only a vague or implicit idea of its operations, of how culture *can* be seen, will in many fundamental ways be unable to develop an approach which offers the best odds of making sense of communicative practices.

Two important ideas have emerged. First, if culture is to be made an object of learning, then learners need a systematic and analytic approach; second, at the same time culture cannot be reduced, or explained in relation to any one privileged cultural system. They show that the concepts that have been discussed in this chapter need a place in the Foreign Language Curriculum, if it is to offer itself as culturally focused. Rather than existing only as content, so that the values, or practices, objects or discourses of a culture can be outlined and presented as intellectually digestible information, these concepts should be managed and applied analytically, so that they can offer the student three interconnected benefits: 1) a range of focal points 2) a methodological perspective that allows 'multiple layering'



of explanation and thus 3) an insurance against simplistic, premature conclusions, teleological explanations and hypostatizing analysis.

The concepts that were outlined in this chapter serve as focal points from which the researcher can ask questions, examples of which have been suggested in previous sections. Rather than ask 'what are the practices' the researcher should ask 'how are these constructed *as* practices? What delimits them? Where do these practices spread their tentacles to other practices? What feeds them?

The biggest problem in introducing or offering the concepts that were offered in this chapter is that they would need to be introduced to learners, and this raises many important questions, including:

1. Are they universal enough to be applicable to all cultures?
2. What about students who are not interested or are unconvinced that cultural analysis would improve their chances of attaining communicative competence?
3. Are these conceptualizations too difficult or too abstract?
4. When should they be introduced? How?
5. Is it *enforcing* students to adopt an approach they might not benefit from?

The following chapters are required to answer these questions.

## CHAPTER 5

### Learning and 'Becoming'

The challenge to mutual understanding with those very different from ourselves is always...a challenge to our visceral sensibilities, not just our minds and our vocabularies (Calhoun 1995: 294).

Is there a difference between how humans learn (in general) and how humans learn how to communicate? Is knowledge/language acquisition an individually or socially driven process? To put it another way is the 'individual' an independent, cognitive entity ( a body) acquiring 'input' or a part of the whole (an organ), dependent on the functioning of others? These are some questions that need to be addressed, since the answers one provides is reflective of how one conceives the challenge of foreign language and culture learning.

Coming to 'understand' the *logic* of practices implies a much more complicated objective than being able to make grammatically correct utterances. If the previous chapter is anything to go by, the learner can no longer be comforted by supposedly transparent words and syntax, facts and generalizations, nor subsequently by simple instructions. To be in possession of such information is not the same as being able to apply it appropriately, not the same as having mastered relevant requisites of socially contextualized competence, or of approximating the (multiplicity of the) logic(s) of practice of target groups. Nor can she feel that her learning objective has

a beginning and/or an end, that learning another language or culture is simply a journey (in stages) between finite points.

While the previous chapter aimed to focus on ontological issues of culture, it is apparent that epistemological issues are thoroughly 'bundled' into them. As Hall (1990: 331) notes, 'Issues of epistemology...become bound with issues of ontology in a way that ties a Gordian knot.' In fact, many epistemological issues and claims have already been made or at least implied in the previous chapter by dint of the fact that the claim to answer *what* culture is and where it comes from, presupposes an understanding of *how* we come to know culture, as well as make claims that we know this. Thus, the notions of habitus and of dialogism for example can equally be considered as epistemological theories, since they discuss how culture is produced through the co-creation of cultural knowledge: how we come to know arises out of practical immersion in that 'what'.

Like ontological theories, epistemological theories tend to proceed from the objectivist/subjectivist dichotomy. Arguments either develop from the proposition that there is an objectively knowable, unitary world, that is, that there is one true representation of reality that all humans come to know, or that one constructs representations and understandings of the world on an (inter)subjective basis. Given the fact that the previous chapter has already allied itself with the reality-as-semiotic-construct position, it may by now be obvious that this chapter will concentrate as to how that understanding is 'constructed', rather than say, 'given' or 'mirrored' in the learning process.

In chapter 3 it was shown how linguists and SLA scholars consider acculturation to be affected by three factors: social, affective and cognitive (with cognitive aspects of acculturation being the least understood). This chapter will proceed from that outline, but consider the problem of learning (about) another culture from a perspective of learning *per se*, rather than focus on the factors involved in learning language, as considered in the theories advanced by linguists. Thus it will draw on

research and theory that attempts to understand the learning and (and the learning as) socialization process, not the linguistic acquisition process. Of particular interest, as mentioned, will be theories that promote social and interactional aspects of learning, including social aspects of cognition, and what this chapter hopes ultimately to outline is a set of principles that can be taken as fundamental to the facilitation of conditions and features suited to the learning of culture and communicative and performative competence.

### **5.1 Sociocultural and Sociocognitive Learning Theory**

Language learning theory, like general learning theory, has traditionally been divided into two broadly conceived schools: rationalist and empirical (Diller 1971), or cognitive versus behavioral (Brown 1987; Lightbown and Spada 1993), where on the one hand (first language) learning is thought to be a mental process arising out of an individual's innate cognitive structures – in linguistics this theory most famously represented by Chomsky's positing of the 'language acquisition device' or Universal Grammar (e.g. Chomsky 1980) – or on the other hand, is considered to be learned through conditioning experience and interaction with the world.

Rationalist and cognitive perspectives supplanted behaviorist perspectives in the latter half of the twentieth century by criticizing the passiveness of behavioral learning, and the absence of 'mind' that it implied (Jonassen 1991). In turn, cognitive perspectives have been criticized for seeing knowledge as commodity, and learning as the individual's acquisition of skills (Salomon and Perkins 1998). Both however, in their own way, can be seen to posit an objective reality that the learner comes to represent. And they can be criticized with regard to the instructional strategies they have engendered in that:

both behavioral and cognitive conceptions of instruction seek to analyze, decompose, and simplify tasks in order to make instruction – and by inference, learning – easier and more efficient. [However] the process of reducing the complexity of learning tasks, whether cognitively or behaviorally based may well be misrepresenting the thinking or mental processing required by the task. Such

decomposition also misrepresents the nature of the content which is often fraught with irregularity and complexity (Jonassen 1991: 8)

(As for foreign language teaching, it is difficult to ascertain if any particular approach can be said to have dominated. Practices that encourage rote learning and the memorization of words and phrases for example, would ultimately imply both, since they involve directed and passive (behavioral) acquisition of skills (cognitive). This might be said to be equally relevant with regard to many methods considered communicative, if one bears in mind that CLT aimed to reconceptualize the nature of communication, not learning or learning theory (see 2.3) as such: any implication that CLT leans to a sociocultural conception of learning is therefore perhaps more incidental than is acknowledged, and must be assumed.)

Sociocultural learning theory however, places emphasis on the social influence on cognition, thus undermining the extremity of both cognitive and behavioral perspectives. Salomon and Perkins note: 'a focus on the individual learning in social and cultural solitude is increasingly being seen as conceptually unsatisfying an ecologically deficient' (Salomon and Perkins 1998: 2). The reason for this, it is felt, is because research conducted in the laboratory charting cognitive and mental operations neglects the mediational factors of learning, that is, does not take into account the presence, influence and relationships of other people or things that are involved. This applies equally to enculturation and acculturation, since learning to behave and conduct oneself socially necessitates the 'input' of *others* (as opposed to the input of language) so that one can gauge one's performance and adapt it according to their presence. This after all is a basic principle of Bakhtin's dialogicality: if learning language is to learn the utterances of others, then logically others need to be involved in the individual's learning process. This is social learning and socialization.

There are a number of interpretations of social learning, denoting various conditions to which it can refer. Salomon and Perkins (1998: 3) list six of these conditions, or 'learning systems,' which they see as facilitating the conditions critical to learning:

active social mediation of individual learning: in essence teaching in its various configurations (one to many, one to one or many to one). It is a condition where external social processes are internalized to affect cognitive performance. It is based on Vygotskian research, in particular the notion of the zone of proximal development, and has been adapted to become known as social 'scaffolding', in which two processes are seen to be involved: internalization and active construction of knowledge in forms of problem solving 'with the help of explicit guidance, modeling, encouragement, mirroring, and feedback' (Salomon and Perkins 1998: 7). Effective features of expert guidance include 'rapid feedback, highly personalized and situationally contingent guidance, encouragement, elicitation of responses from the student in the form of explanations, suggestions, reflections, and considerations rather than the provision of ready-made information, directions, error corrections, or answers' (Salomon and Perkins 1998: 7). Salomon and Perkins also draw on Slavin (1994) who argues that two additional conditions are necessary: shared group goals and personal accountability.

social mediation as participatory knowledge construction: this is where knowledge is constructed *in situ* by all involved, that is, not only the learner but also the 'facilitating social agent' (Salomon and Perkins 1998: 8). Thus, 'the base paradigm is the historical event in which events and contexts are necessarily and inevitably interwoven' (Salomon and Perkins 1998: 9), and knowledge is jointly constructed, not 'handed down'. Conditions 1 and 2 thus contrast in terms of individual and social distinctions of learning, where condition 1 implies that knowledge is passed on from one (expert) to another, and condition 2 that both participants jointly create knowledge and understanding.

social mediation by cultural scaffolding: created by interaction with socially and historically situated artifacts and tools. The notion of tools refers to anything from 'symbolic resources', to books, to statistical tools, which embody the hidden assumptions of a culture. Tools have dual roles, in that they act upon the world and transform it: there are effects *with* the tool, and effects *of* the tool (1998: 11).

the social entity as a learning system: this refers to group learning, such as in teams and organizations. Where in participatory knowledge construction the individual 'takes' knowledge from participation in groups, in social entity learning the team as a whole learn together. Knowledge and feedback 'commonly takes the form of assessment against such distal goals as bottom-line profit and such proximal goals as people's happiness or divisional efficiencies' (1998:14). Organizational learning is hindered by such features as individuals holding different criteria of success, interpretation of difficulties being the result of an 'insufficiently vigorous pursuit of the policy' (1998: 15) and opponents interpreting the same data as bad policy. Salomon and Perkins talk about 'high road' and 'low road' learning systems: 'high road' learning is conceptually oriented, intentional and self-regulated, 'low road' learning systems occur without 'mindfulness or reflective abstraction' and are characterized by the identification of a problem, a plan devised to solve it, the prominence of one or few individuals, and its practices reinforced as much by 'accidental circumstances as by any reliable consequences' (1998: 15). Typically, they argue, organizations are characterized by low road learning: 'after all, first and foremost organizations are performance systems, not learning systems' (1998: 15).

The first four definitions aim to describe various types of interaction, while the final two refer more to learning as adaptation:

learning to learn: learning to learn ways to 'participate in and capitalize on the social milieu' (1998: 5).

learning social content: 'learning how to get along with others, how to maintain reasonable assertiveness, how to collaborate reaching decisions and taking collective actions' (1998: 6).

In a more generalized combination of these various versions of socialized learning, Gee provides a list of principles which might serve as the foundations of sociocognitive theory. These include:

1. *The insertion principle*: 'Efficacious learning of a new complex system is a process involving socially supported and scaffolded insertion into an activity that one does not yet understand'
2. *The routine principle*: Activities that are ritual or routine serve to 'freeze' meaning for observation and understanding.
3. *The public principle*: 'The meanings of the parts of new systems, whether words, visual symbols, actions, or objects must initially be rendered public and overt so that the learner can see the connection between the sign and their interpretations'
4. *The context variability principle* – There is a need for a variety of contexts in which 'general rules' can be inferred from specific situations.

(Gee 1995: 336-346)

In sum, knowledge and its growth is a consequence of conditions and interactions – all of which are intrinsically social. These definitions might be summed up then, by saying that: 'all mental activity – from perceptual recognition to memory to problem solving – involves either representations of other people or the use of artifacts and cultural forms that have a social history' (Levine, Resnick and Higgins 1993: n/p). In other words, as the term 'sociocognitive' implies, the theory emphasizes the role of social conditions on the potential for learning. The following sections will continue to explore various perspectives that advance this position. One of the main sources of this perspective is Vygotskian theory.

### **5.1.1 Vygotsky**

Bakhtin's description of dialogism is as much epistemological as it is ontological, since he posits the necessity of dialogic exchange for knowledge, perception and reality to be co-produced. This perspective is very much shared and elaborated by a fellow Russian, the developmental psychologist L. S. Vygotsky, whose work is a well established theoretical framework in (general) educational research. It has also come under increasing attention in SLA research, with Lantolf (1993; 1999; 2000 ed.; and Appell 1995; and Pavlenko 1995) in particular being one of its advocates,



though he too notes that sociocultural theory is still at the margins of SLA research (Lantolf and Pavlenko 2000; also Schinke-Llano 1993).

Vygotsky studied the mental and cognitive development of children, and in outlining his theory, challenged strict divisions between individual cognition and sociocultural contexts (Thorne 2000). In essence, the theory holds that concepts are socially formed, not individually (Davson-Galle 1999), and learning always takes place in situations of interaction within the social world. Learning therefore, is a mutual, dialogic process.

As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities – it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person...activities, tasks, functions, and understandings do not exist in isolation; they are part of broader systems of relations in which they have meaning (Lave and Wenger 1991: 53).

Vygotsky aims to show that children develop what he calls higher psychological processes and ‘practical intelligence’ concomitant with the development of speech. He challenges prior psychological theories that separate the development of speech and the ability to abstract and solve problems. Rather, in development, speech and action ‘are *one and the same complex psychological function*’ (Vygotsky 1978: 25 emphasis in original). Vygotsky thus locates cognitive development in practice, arguing that ‘the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge’ (Vygotsky 1978: 24).

From experiments in children’s capabilities at problem-solving, Vygotsky notes that egocentric speech is closely connected to socialized speech<sup>1</sup>. Socialized speech is ‘turned inward’ and becomes the interpersonal:

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<sup>1</sup> Children left to themselves during problem-solving activities immediately begin to talk to themselves for guidance, in place of absent others to whom they can appeal for help.

when children develop a method of behavior for guiding themselves that had previously been used in relation to another person, when they organize their own activities according to a social form of behavior, they succeed in applying a social attitude to themselves. The history of the process of *the internalization of social speech* is also the history of the socialization of children's practical intellect (Vygotsky 1978: 27, emphasis in original).

Even in terms of perceiving the world, Vygotsky's research shows that 'at very early stages of development, language and [visual] perception are linked' (Vygotsky 1978: 33). People do not only see the world in color and in shape 'but also as a world with sense and meaning' (Vygotsky 1978: 33). Perception is therefore a process of categorization and interpretation, and not merely the passive reception of stimuli.

### *Mediation and Regulation*

One of the key arguments Vygotsky advances is that learning is facilitated by a process of mediation, which, as the term suggests, refers to what might be called 'third party' involvement between humans and the objective world. In particular Vygotsky highlights the use of sign and the tool as being key mediating objects. The tool, as he sees it, is externally oriented and can be anything that acts to influence external objects, while the sign is internally oriented, as it is 'a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself' (Vygotsky 1978: 55). In essence Vygotsky says that by using signs and tools, humans change and affect both the world and themselves. He argues that 'the mastering of nature and the mastering of behavior are mutually linked' (Vygotsky 1978: 55), and thereby conflates the distinction between external and the internal, and situates the learning process both in outwardly and inwardly oriented activity.

Higher psychological function for Vygotsky is the result of these mediating effects:

the use of artificial means, the transition to mediated activity, fundamentally changes all psychological operations just as the use of tools limitlessly broadens the range of activities within which the new psychological functions may operate. (Vygotsky 1978: 55)

One possibly controversial repercussion of the notion of mediated learning is that the individual is not entirely 'contained' by his or her biological barriers:

because what we call the mind works through artifacts it cannot be unconditionally bound by the head nor even by the body, but must be seen as distributed in the artifacts which are woven together and which weave together individual human actions in concert with and as a part of the permeable changing events of life. (Cole and Wertsch 1997)

This in turn raises the familiar individual-society dichotomy, since it can be taken to suggest that Vygotsky holds to an entirely deterministic view of socialization. However, as Wertsch and Cole (1997) note this is a result of misreading Vygotsky. Although learning is social activity, Vygotsky (1978: 55) acknowledges the individual's unique history as playing a role in development, and argues that 'there cannot be a single organically predetermined internal system of activity that exists for each psychological function', in other words, there is no fixed and predictable learning process.

#### *Zone of Proximal Development and Participant Interaction*

The 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) is a term Vygotsky uses to refer what he identifies as an optimal time for learning. More specifically, he defines it as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with peers (Vygotsky 1978: 86).

When learners are confronted with problems beyond their capabilities they benefit by turning to others for guidance in solving them. Learning in this sense occurs through 'peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991), whereby the learner observes the instructor until the learner can operate to solve problems and tasks independently. For this reason immersion in genuine activity – as an 'apprentice' – is emphasized as the condition that promotes learning.

Rogoff identifies and analyses three planes of focus in sociocultural learning, though she stresses that they are mutually constitutive, inseparable and interdependent: apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation. Apprenticeship, already mentioned, refers to activity in which part of its purpose is the development of the learner into 'mature participation'. Guided participation refers to processes of involvement and participation in social activity. It is supported by the direction that cultural and social values as well as social partners offer (guidance), and the observation and 'hands-on' involvement in activities (participation). Participatory appropriation indicates the change in learners as their involvement in activity progresses, and which subsequently prepares them for participation in related activities (Rogoff 1995: 142).

### *Scaffolding*

Scaffolding is an idea that has developed more from extensions of Vygotsky's theory than from Vygotsky himself. Closely related to dialogic perspective of communication, scaffolding refers to the attributes of turn-taking in face-to-face interactions and conversations in parent-child or instructor-learner contexts. More specifically, Fosnot enumerates the process:

- 1) focusing on the learner's conception, 2) extending or challenging the conception, 3) refocusing by encouraging clarification, and 4) redirecting by offering new possibilities for consideration (Fosnot 1996: 21).

Thus, instead of one-directional instruction, scaffolding points out the nature of focusing on learner's output, and 'stretching' the learner's conceptualization with feedback in the form of corrected or more appropriate repetition or response, where stretching might be considered to bring learners into the ZPD.

### **5.1.2    *Applications of Vygotsky in SLA Research and Foreign Language Teaching***

The most obvious consideration in referring to sociocultural theory for an understanding of the learning process is whether the concepts and discoveries bear any relevance to *second* language socialization, given the fact that Vygotsky concentrates on primary socialization.

As noted, applications of the theories and concepts developed by Vygotsky are not entirely unknown in SLA research, though it would be difficult to assess how or if any of the theory or findings have been translated to FLT practices (on a wide scale). In SLA research the processes of object, other and self regulation, as well as the concept of the zone of proximal development have interested scholars. In the main, evidence of these processes and stages has been sought in the analysis of classroom interactions and learner discourses (e.g. Brooks and Donato 1994). Frawley and Lantolf show by way of analyzing transcripts of adult beginner and advanced L2 learners, and mature and child native speakers, that beginner L2 learners produce output similar to that of native children. They thus conclude that adults learn L2 in the same progressive stages as children learn their native language, that the 'relationship among second language speakers, adult native speakers, and native children is a continuous one' (Frawley and Lantolf 1985: 40).

Pavlenko and Lantolf hope to apply Vygotskian theory to establish a new research perspective, and argue that SLA should give greater than heretofore attention and academic status to the 'participation metaphor' (PM), not as a replacement but as supplement to the 'acquisition metaphor' (AM). The PM is based on sociohistorical and social constructionist theories which are still marginalized in a field 'in which the preeminent metaphors are computationalism' (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 155). The participation metaphor, they suggest, allows us to view language learning as a 'process of becoming a member of a certain community' (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 155). The 'PM stresses contextualization and engagement with others...in its attempt to investigate the *how*' (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 156), rather than the

*what* in SLA. In so framing their focus, they hope to accord greater weight to first-person narratives of language learning experiences: in their words, they intend to 'establish "retroactive" first person narratives as a legitimate source of data of the learning process' (2000: 158). This intent is based on Bakhtin's 'views on the self constituted as a story, through which happenings in specific places and at specific times are made coherent' (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 158).

Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995) provide a comprehensive review of applications of sociocultural theory in SLA research. They cite research which concentrates on the importance and potential of private speech (self-regulation) for the L2 acquisition process. Among findings are those that conclude that inner speech rehearsal is important for short-term memory (de Guerrero 1994), that L2 adults revert to inner, private speech in order to regain control of their mental activity (Frawley and Lantolf 1985: 112), that cultural background influences the use and frequency of inner speech (McCafferty 1992), and that internal speech used to recall texts co-occurs with the attempt to comprehend them (Appel and Lantolf 1994)

Schinke-Llano (1993) suggests that Vygotskian thought can be applied to SLA in predominantly two ways. First, she agrees with Frawley and Lantolf (1985) that errors in second language learning should not be viewed as flaws but as attempts at gaining control of tasks, that is, that learners are striving to attain self-regulation. Second, she argues that communicative strategies be subsumed into the object-, other- and self- regulation model to analyze various interactions.

Van Lier (1988) is one of the few scholars who have sought to understand the direct implications of Vygotskian sociocultural theory for the L2 classroom, though admittedly not in depth. He suggests that pedagogy take from the notion of the ZPD three points:

It is important to find the appropriate social interaction to allow learning to take place. We should seek, be prepared to stimulate, and guide natural attention-focusing tendencies in the students, since they are likely to be in the ZPD.

We must educate the students to make their own decisions increasingly, and in order to do that we must make sure that they know what they are doing.  
(Van Lier 1988: 72)

### **5.1.3    *Comments on the Benefits and Limits of the Vygotskian Approach in FLT***

One of the most important things one realizes with regard to sociocultural theory and its application in the domain foreign language learning is that it has been used as a researcher's tool, rather than, say a curriculum designer's, a teacher's, or even a learner's tool. It has been used, in other words, to help researcher's name, categorize and identify learning patterns and stages. Researchers have applied Vygotskian theory analytically and retrospectively: they have used its concepts to find evidence of the learning patterns those concepts outline, and are therefore not 'proactive' in helping pedagogy establish environments where learning is facilitated. In this sense the understanding developed by such research is *a priori*, and while the insights gained from it may help us to understand better the kinds of positive – and constrictive, types of interactions that often occur in classrooms, little has yet been developed by way of helping FL pedagogy to formulate principles for either pedagogy or the learning of foreign languages.

When the process of studying as opposed to 'natural' learning is considered, the context is invariably formal (implying that studying and natural learning are not compatible). Thus, when Pavlenko and Lantolf note that the participation metaphor helps us attend to how learners become members of a community, the community they have in mind is the classroom community, not the target communities in which learners will one day be expected to interact. To put it another way, it seems researchers want better to understand students, rather than learners, and the contexts which they analyze are limited to the classroom. Lave and Wenger note that 'typically, theories, when they are concerned with the situated nature of learning at all, address its sociocultural character by considering only its immediate context'

(Lave and Wenger 1991: 54). This is attested to by much of the SLA research mentioned here.

Because learning is understood as mediated process, it seems there is no questioning regarding the purpose or outcome of such mediation. This suggests that everything is epistemologically valuable, that the tasks set by teachers provide universally applicable opportunities for learning, that all content is representative of culture and language. A case in point is Van Lier (quoted above) who, despite making otherwise interesting suggestions, continues to concentrate on the problem of linguistic acquisition. Another writer is Foley (1991) for instance, who uses Vygotsky to argue for a traditional task-based approach. Moreover, the emphasis on expert-novice learning dynamic overrides learning that that occurs *by* the expert: do teachers not also learn from their students? Does the expert not gain insights while instructing? The notion of mediated learning likewise neglects learning that is incidental, and arises out of 'mistakes'.

In focusing on strategy, theorists of a Vygotskian persuasion do not challenge assumptions that underpin the design and choice of content and methodology. Sociocultural theory, in this incarnation, does not do anything to undermine legitimized practices, conceptualizations of communication, or the way academia evaluates language ability: it is in fact used to reinforce and reproduce them, since anything that is constructed as an object of study can be legitimized by a Vygotskian approach. As Fosnot (1996: 21) points out, this is because Vygotskian theory holds to an objective view of reality, that is, whereby learning is the transmission of corresponding truth, from 'knower of truth' to learner. Pedagogy in this way can guide the learner to acquire anything that has been deemed necessary academically, rather than relevant socially – and this is a big distinction, and therefore does not query the choice of what and why a learning object has been deemed necessary in the first instance. The objective is to get learners to problem-solve, which may be acceptable approach in its own right, but there is nothing to suggest that the specific problems that have been set by the task-master are



anything but random and arbitrary. In short, it seems a missed opportunity to turn to Vygotsky only to remain within the conservative a well-established paradigm of language pedagogy.

With sociocultural theory as a conceptual foundation, Lantolf asks 'how and to what extent learners can become cognitively like a member of another culture' (Lantolf 1999: 29), through 'cognitive restructuring' (Lantolf 1999: 39). This is a highly questionable problematic on a number of levels. For one, to be able to determine that one person thinks like another presupposes that one knows how the first person thinks. To 'see' patterns of similarity does not necessarily indicate cognitive similarity. Vygotskian theory emphasizes the degree to which agents are in effect socially created as *practicing* and *practical* agents. Why would one therefore want to create cognitive similarity? Moreover, Lantolf doesn't make clear why he believes cognitive restructuring should be viewed as a goal, something that needs to be forced or encouraged (as opposed to taking place automatically and inevitably through practices and dialogue). To consider the possibility of being cognitively like other members poses difficult philosophical and epistemological problems, ones which Lantolf appears to underrate. How are you supposed to determine this goal anyway? Is being 'cognitively like' an epistemological destination?

Many researchers who turn to Vygotsky therefore seem also to have an ambiguous relation to the ontological status of their concepts. For Lantolf, cultural cognition arising from mediation and regulation is unproblematic and homogenous. Despite acknowledging the dialectical interrelationship between cultural and personal models (Lantolf 1999: 31), he neither elaborates nor speculates as to the content or nature of these models, and one can only presume that he envisions them as uniform and stable. Language too is thus seen as relatively fixed, if not paradigmatic, by those who wish to apply Vygotskian framework in the foreign language classroom – it is left at the level of 'input'. In this case however, this limitation may be attributable to Vygotsky, since he too has been charged with

envisioning a uniformity of meaning and knowledge. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994: 185) write that he 'did not go far enough. Discourse is not a single, generic, homogenous event throughout society.'

A question of interpretation is raised when Frawley and Lantolf (1985: 24) argue that 'the individual is of primary importance in Vygotskian theory, and thus instances of individual discourse are the only legitimate objects of analysis'. Donato and McCormick however, refer to Lontiev – a Vygotskian contemporary – to state that 'activity, and not the individual, is the most useful unit of analysis' (Donato 1994: 455). This is a clear example of the disparity of purposes to which Vygotskian theory has so far been applied in SLA, and this may have more to do with the motives with which researchers consider Vygotskian theory to support their case, rather than any direct, neutral and obvious pertinence it has to L2 teaching and learning.

The zone of proximal development is also a problematic notion, and its acceptance in SLA might be due in part to its familiarity: the notion of needing input or problems that are set slightly above the capacity of learners is of course similar to Krashen's *i + 1* hypothesis. However, to suggest that ZPD constrains or determines an optimal time-frame for learners is discomfiting.

Despite these criticisms – which as noted are at any rate more reflective of *interpretations* of Vygotskian theory, a number of important principles can be procured from it. Of great significance for example is the stress on the dependence of cognition on mutual social practice, involvement, participation and interaction. Seen as a principle, it demands that learners become mutual participants and co-producers of problem solving strategies, rather than passive observers, or isolated entities. This means that problems should not be solved through the provision of set of rules, which learners then apply unquestioningly, but that the rules and norms themselves are seen as part of the construction and solution of the problem.

The notion of mediated activity or situated interaction also lends support, for example, to the idea that language learners should be exposed to 'authentic text' but in a guided way (in other words, with conceptual tools or other people). Problems need to be seen as contingent on genuine outcomes, rather than random and practically irrelevant pedagogical choices. In other words, what learners do must be seen by them to have outcomes beyond the fulfillment of the task for its own sake. Combined with a developing awareness of the social and cultural appropriateness of their solutions, such problems would represent the possibility of genuine epistemological gain.

Moreover, instead of seeing the notions of mediation as justification for 'hierarchizing' learning tasks according to difficulty, or according to the perceived stage of competence learners are at, these concepts should in fact serve to remind us that there are *different* means to go about approaching activities and problems, and that learners be given the opportunities to exploit them at any time. To put it another way, we might say that instead of matching tasks to learners, we should let learners match themselves to tasks, since we cannot predict how they will make use of them, or how and when they will be of benefit to learners: what one day is 'simple' to one learner and difficult to another may be reversed the next day with a different problem, and it is important to cater to this.

Finally, while questionable on some levels, the zone of proximal development does point to the need to understand the role of time in learning. Rather than consider the ZPD as a *goal* (which the geographical notion of 'zone' implies), which must be attained before learning can take place, the ZPD should be considered as a *duration* or a *cycle*, in which learning is most intense, but also periodic. Viewed in this way, learning can be acknowledged as unpredictable and individual, obligating pedagogy to open up the time frame of learning by catering to the variance of learner's TLC acquisition, rather than shutting it down with fixed timetables. Indeed, the issue of 'temporal asynchrony' (Bates et al. 1995), which holds that there is a lag between acquisition and the emergence and application of appropriate performance

undermines the practice of expecting learners immediately (or even by test week) to memorize or confidently use the language objects they have been 'taught' in class.

## **5.2 Constructivism**

Constructivism is a model of learning and teaching that is associated with the epistemological theory of Jean Piaget, as well as with Vygotskian sociocultural theory, and is compatible with dialogism and poststructural semiotics and theory. At its foundation, it promotes a semantic and hermeneutic perspective of reality and knowledge, rather than an objective and transcendental perspective. It has been shown that Vygotskian theory emphasizes the social, dialogic nature of enculturation and learning. Constructivism, though in many ways a kindred theory, places more stress on the individual's cognitive processes and aims to cater to the learner's personally developing and on-going construction of meaning and understanding.

### **5.2.1 *Constructivism and the Constructivist Theory of Learning***

Where in objectivist and behaviorist theory the representation of the world in the mind is direct and corresponding to an independently meaningful reality, constructivism holds that, rather than being self-presenting, reality, facts, knowledge and selves are actively generated (Bruffee 1986). Reality is in itself perceived by humans in a 'continuous albeit variable stream' (Anderson 1996: 37) that needs to 'punctuated' by us in moments of semiosis, that is, in moments where what we perceive becomes meaningful: when driving for example, the senses may perceive a light stream as green, but the moment of semiosis recognizes a 'green light' that allows us to continue our journey. Various constructionist leanings argue that it is human activity that: punctuates (semiotic constructionism), consciously intends and determines as experience and event (phenomenological constructionism), interprets and acts upon (pragmatic constructionism), ideologically encodes (cultural constructionism) and produces and historicizes (actional constructionism) reality (Anderson 1996: 37-42).

Cognition, from a constructivist perspective, is seen neither to be innately nor environmentally determined but to be adaptive, allowing one to organize the experiential world, not to make mirror images of it (von Glasersfeld 1989; 1996). As Bruffee writes 'we do not generate knowledge...by "dealing with" the physical reality that shoves us around. We generate knowledge by "dealing with" our *beliefs* about the physical reality that shoves us around' (Bruffee 1986: 777). Instead of adhering to notions of correspondence of representation therefore, constructivists focus on the viability and coherence of our beliefs and their consequences on our actions: 'concepts, models, theories, and so on are viable if they prove adequate in the contexts in which they were created' (von Glasersfeld 1989: 7). If there is no one-to-one correspondence with reality, the object of learning cannot be that reality *per se*. Thus with learning, the process, rather than the (supposedly attainable) product is of major importance: "How one arrives at a particular answer, and not the retrieval of an 'objectively true solution', is what is important" (Forrester and Jantzie 2002).

#### *Piaget's Model of Learning*

Much of Piaget's complicated epistemological theory describes the 'concomitant construction of subject and object, whereby the structuration of cognitive tools parallels the organization of reality' (Franco and Colinviaux-de-Dominguez 1992: 258-259). Piaget argues against both Lamarckian as well as Darwinian accounts of evolution and development (Fosnot 1996). Lamarck theorized that organisms accommodate to the pressures of the environment by making structural and genetic changes, while Darwin felt that organisms evolve through random mutations, with the most successful mutations being 'selected' for survival. Piaget in contrast, hypothesized that 'behavior drives the evolution of new structures because the development of new behavior, more or less, causes an imbalance in the genome... This perturbation causes a series of possibilities, or "mutations," to result in the genome' (Fosnot 1996: 12).

The perturbation that arises is re-balanced through a process Piaget thought of as equilibration (Piaget 1977), which he also applied to cognitive development and learning. He further identified three forms of equilibration: assimilation and accommodation; organization of contradictory objects and concepts into schemes and sub-schemes, and; integration and differentiation of their relations at a higher conceptual level.

Assimilation is a cognitive attempt to conserve an individual's autonomy in a social system, whereby new experiences are organized within extant logical structures and understandings. Since contradictions and disequilibrating effects often arise from the attempt to fit new experiences into current understandings, accommodation, in contrast, is an adaptive process, and refers to the 'reflective, integrative behavior that serves to change one's own self and explicate the object in order for us to function with cognitive equilibrium in relation to it' (Fosnot 1996: 13). Assimilation and accommodation thus 'provide a dynamic interplay that by its own intrinsic, self-organizing nature serves to keep the system in an open, flexible, growth-producing state' (Fosnot 1996: 14) – hence constructive learning.

### **5.2.2 *Constructivist Pedagogy***

Constructivist theory has had quite a significant impact in educational theory and practice in recent years. Yet, as Fosnot points out,

Constructivism is a theory about learning, not a description of teaching. No "cookbook teaching style" or pat set of instructional techniques can be abstracted from the theory and proposed as a constructivist approach to teaching (1996: 29).

This results in two applications of constructivism in the pedagogical field. On the one hand, constructivist learning theory can offer a critique of many current teaching practices according to its understanding of the learner's strategies and phases, while on the other hand, it can offer a general set of principles to teaching and institutional dynamics (which, depending on one's outlook either represents too abstract an approach to be of use, or a liberating opening of possibilities).

Thus, for example, because knowledge is not seen to be corresponding, but coherent, constructivist educators do not adhere to notions that 'what is taught is what is learned,' and criticize educative practices that continue to conceive of instruction as the dispensing of knowledge:

Too often teaching strategies and procedures seem to spring from the naive assumption that what we ourselves perceive and infer from our perceptions is there, ready-made, for the students to pick up, if only they had the will to do so' (von Glasersfeld 1996: 5).

With its emphasis on subjective and personal interpretation and knowledge construction therefore, constructivist pedagogy pits itself against practices that encourage rote learning and memorization of already-given concepts and ideas. In place of these 'traditional' practices, constructivist pedagogy places premium on cognitive flexibility and non-linearity of knowledge acquisition and assembly:

The realm of constructive processes must be taken beyond the retrieval of knowledge structures from memory (for the purpose of going beyond the information given in some learning situation) to also include the independent, flexible, situation-specific assembly of the background knowledge structures themselves (Spiro et al. 1999)

Another constructivist-based approach (though it is often equally associated with Vygotskian sociocultural theory, and is related to the notion of apprenticeship learning) is that which emphasizes 'situated cognition'. Its overriding theme is the need for learning to be placed in authentic contexts, since knowledge must be developed concomitantly within the conditions of its application (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989). Rather than separate knowledge from interaction, so that rules and prescriptions can be formulated independently of their manifestation, the concept of situated cognition categorizes knowledge and the context in which it is applied as indistinct and inseparable: concepts, argue Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989: 33), as with dictionary defined words do not 'crystallize into a categorical definition[s],' as they involve and require continuous and negotiated development in order to be counted as knowledge.

With another metaphor, Brown, Collins and Duguid discuss the contrast between inert concepts and their application in terms of the use of tools: one might be able to acquire tools, they argue, but not be able to use them. Further, and in light of arguments against the abstraction of grammar and language from communication, one can certainly empathize with the position that: 'students are too often asked to use the tools of a discipline without being able to adopt its culture' (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989: 33). For Brown, Collins and Duguid therefore, learning is always akin to enculturation, whether it be as school children, office workers or researchers, and is not simply the apparently appropriate use of tools. In some ways ironically however, this means that learners may well learn the 'culture' of the classroom in lieu of learning the supposed learning object itself: educational activity 'too often tends to be hybrid, implicitly framed by one culture, but explicitly attributed to another' (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989: 34). Situated cognition activities, in contrast, aim to direct attention to real-life rather than instructionally designed problems. And although it can be criticized for positing an idealized notion of context, as well as presenting an unrealistic and vague instructional model, the notion of situated cognition, 'in its more modest form...has considerable appeal (Wilson and Cole 1991: 51), as it emphasizes the role of genuine problem solving in appropriate conditions.

Forrester and Jantzie outline the pedagogical shift from behaviorism to constructivism:

- From linear to hypermedia
- From instruction to construction and discovery
- From teacher-centered to learner-centered education
- From absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn
- From school to lifelong learning
- From one-size-fits-all to customized learning
- From learning as torture as learning as fun
- From the teacher as transmitter to the teacher as facilitator

(Forrester and Jantzie 2002: n/p)

As the first line indicates, constructivist based teaching is significantly interested in, and is often allied with educative technology (e.g. Duffy and Jonassen 1992; Nix



and Spiro 1990; Tapscott 1998), and identifies in computer programs and networks the potential to realize many of its objectives. Multimedia programs for example, allow the presentation of learning material in multiple modes and formats to make possible the formation of various constructions, they allow self-paced and self-directed learning, and can provide immediate and personal feedback.

Another principal feature of constructivism is its conceptualization of the instructor's role. Because the external world is not conceptually 'mapped' by all humans in exactly the same way, it can no longer be held that the teacher's role is to provide such a map (Jonassen 1991). In the constructivist vocabulary therefore, teachers are coordinators, facilitators, resource advisors, tutors or coaches (Gergen 1985). These roles are seen to change the practice of teaching from that of providing knowledge to providing ideas and tools with which to interpret given subjects, as well as that of diagnosis and analysis of interpretations.

Changing teacher's roles is also seen to change educational attitudes and perspectives, and in these terms von Glasersfeld (1996: 6) argues that there are 'certain circumscribed areas in which a constructivist orientation can modify a teacher's attitude'. For example, it should help teachers and educators realize that students perceive the world that may be wholly different from the ways intended by educational imperatives and discourses. More difficult is that in order to induce conceptual changes in students, educators need to have 'some inkling as to the domains of experience, the concepts, and the conceptual relations the students possess at the moment (von Glasersfeld 1996: 7).

More important than offering concrete or step-by-step guidelines to teaching practices (and in keeping with its tenets) then, constructivists prefer to outline principles of pedagogy which can be adapted and explored in various contexts and across various subjects. The list of principles Fosnot provides is characteristic of constructivist pedagogical theory:

1. Learning is not the result of development; learning is development. It requires invention and self-organization on the part of the learner. Thus teachers need to allow learners to raise their own questions, generate their own hypotheses and models as possibilities, and test them for viability.
2. Disequilibrium facilitates learning. "Errors" need to be perceived as a result of learners' conceptions and therefore not minimized or avoided. Challenging, open-ended investigations in realistic, meaningful contexts need to be offered, thus allowing learners to explore and generate many possibilities, both affirming and contradictory. Contradictions, in particular, need to be illuminated, explored, and discussed.
3. Reflective abstraction is the driving force of learning. As meaning-makers, humans seek to organize and generalize across experiences in a representational form. Allowing reflection time through journal writing, representation in multisymbolic form, and/or discussion of connections across experiences or strategies may facilitate reflective abstraction.
4. Dialogue within a community engenders further thinking. The classroom needs to be seen as a "community of discourse engaged in activity, reflection, and conversation..."
5. Learning proceeds toward the development of structures. As learners struggle to make meaning, progressive structural shifts in perspective are constructed – in a sense, "big ideas". These "big ideas" are learner-constructed, central organizing principles that can be generalized across experiences and that often require the undoing or reorganizing of earlier conceptions. This process continues throughout development (adapted from Fosnot 1996: 29-30)

### **5.2.3    *Comments: Advantages and Limitations of Constructivist Approaches***

As noted above, there are various constructivist schools and there is considerable argument within the various renditions. Instead of here offering criticisms of constructivism as a theoretical paradigm (see Hacking 1999, for example, for an insightful and balanced critique), restrictions of space permit only a commentary on constructivism as it has been treated as an educational model. Having said that, a few words are warranted regarding opposing views of constructivism in general, as well as how they have been responded to.

Most commonly, constructivism, like postmodern theory in general, 'is considered a slippery slope that leads to yet another slippery slope' (Anderson 1996: 42), because it relativizes knowledge by freeing it from a notion of universal experience or objective phenomena. If there is no real, objective 'out there' which is uniformly accessible by humans of all cultures, or even within cultures, then, asks the skeptic, how can humans talk of the same things, or even interact so that we can understand

one another? This has been addressed however, in that constructivism is allied with coherence theories of knowledge. Though the 'true' external world cannot be known by all alike, there is sufficient coherence among the perceptions of humans to describe reality and conditions and states within it to provide a sense of shared understanding, or in Cobb's terminology, the notion of shared understanding or meaning must be 'taken-as-shared' rather than seen to be replicated by all in the same way.

Another important issue arising from advocating a constructivist position is – following the wont of theoretical logic to demand that sides be taken – whether it is representative of an extreme individualist position. If not, how can it be reconciled with the argument that knowledge and cognition is social, when it stresses the individual nature of cognitive development and understanding? From another angle, Piaget's constructivist theory has been criticized for being too structuralist (Franco and Colinviaux-de-Dominguez 1992: 264), and that therefore for considering the mind as being ultimately no more than a 'reference tool to the real world' (Jonassen 1991: 7).

Constructivism, however, is not individualist, and in fact denies individualism, since 'no one of gets to *decide* the manner of co-constructing' reality and knowledge (Anderson 1996: 40 emphasis added). Where traditional cognitive theory attempts to address what goes on the individual's mind, as a mirror to the world, constructivism argues that what goes on in the individual's mind is a result of social experience, that is, that cultural constructions of reality filter and mediate the learner's construction of knowledge. In order for learning to occur at all, it follows, humans need to learn in contexts of social interaction, rather than in isolation. It would obviously be a tautology therefore to say that learning about another culture, or acculturation, requires some form of interaction. As Fosnot writes, 'We cannot understand an individual's cognitive structure without observing it interacting in a context.' (Fosnot 1996: 24)

However, because it is easily interpreted as having an individualist perspective, it is important with regard to education to be vigilant against the development of (or deterioration into) pedagogical models that abdicate all instructional responsibility. Davson-Galle, for example, offers a caution that constructivism should not 'repeat the errors of Inquiry Learning with its excessive emphasis placed upon the individual's conceptual resources and upon simple-minded induction as methodology' (Davson-Galle 1999: 206). Rather, he argues, learners must become acquainted with 'current concepts and hypotheses'. In other words, learning requires the use and application of conceptual tools with which to categorize, schematize and construct understanding. There is no reason why this should not apply to the study and analysis of foreign cultures.

Davson-Galle also challenges the interpretation of constructivist doctrine in educative practice that does not correct students' wrong conclusions, and this is certainly an important concern. There is a significant distinction between creating conditions in which learners 'discover' their knowledge, and permitting, or considering the possibility of free for all construction of meanings. Where aspects such as pronunciation, norms and behaviorally or communicatively appropriate expressions are concerned, there are pragmatically appropriate, correctly shared and of course co-constructed manners in which they are understood by one's interlocutors. In other words, while knowledge and meaningful connections may be subjectively and individually attained, the process involves guidance and instruction. Moreover, any knowledge acquired must also work, it must function to do what the actor wants it to do, and this can only be determined through intersubjective processes. Thus, guidance, explanation and, crucially, feedback as to correctness continue to be vital teaching activities. For this reason constructivism and constructivist teaching needs to be infused with the interpersonal stress of sociocultural theory, so that individualist readings of constructivism are avoided. When such an amalgamation occurs, the result is a solid epistemological position on learning, and subsequently to teaching practice.

In keeping with the notion that learning is in many ways a random and unpredictable series of making conceptual connections, it follows that no single teaching method or approach will satisfy all learning needs, and this must apply to constructivist learning and teaching models. As Jonassen (1991) notes for example, constructivism, like other models and approaches is not a panacea for learning and instruction. Yet one of the more important points to take from this section is that if learning is not a moment of correspondence between what is in reality, in the mind of the teacher and in the understanding of the learner, then the learner will better be served by having more flexibility in approaching their learning problems as well as solving them. In this regard, constructivist based approaches would appear more appropriate as learning instruction models than practices that assume parrot like learning processes. From another angle it is perhaps better said that current foreign language teaching should become *more* (but not devotedly) constructivist in its comprehension of the problem of coming to understand the range of meanings and practices of cultural others.

### **5.3 Experiential Learning and Collaborative Learning**

This section briefly examines two other pedagogical models that have emerged from, are related to, or are compatible with Vygotskian, Piagetian and other constructivist theories of learning, as well as humanistic psychology.

#### **5.3.1 *Experiential Learning***

An influential book in general educational theory (though, as is common, it is less well-known in foreign language pedagogy) is Rogers' (1969; and Freiberg 1994, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) *Freedom to Learn*. Arguing that institutional education has the effect of stifling learner's natural curiosities, interests, and capabilities, he presents a pedagogical model for facilitating learner autonomy based on principles derived from his teaching practice, which essentially stress the importance of immediate and personal experience as being pivotal conditions for learning.

In a passionate statement, Rogers criticizes the dependency of (at least Western) educational systems on evaluation and testing as means for selecting and determining learner's capabilities and success, and denounces as a 'preposterous assumption' the notion that 'evaluation is education; education is evaluation' (Rogers 1969: 174). He likewise questions the correspondence assumption in educative practice, whereby it is implicitly held that 'what is presented...is what the student learns' (Rogers 1969: 177), as well as the notion that learning is a passive process that emerges in manipulable learners whose content and approach is controlled by educational expertise.

The model Rogers offers in place of this standard is one that aims to foster curiosity and interest-driven learning. It is based on the assumption that such learning is a natural extension of development, an inherent rather than coincidental or fortunate human trait. Equally, it is based on the premises that learning occurs through having 'hands-on' experience with learning tasks – hence being experiential - that learning takes place when the subject has personal relevance and meaning, and that the best conditions for this are when psychological threats, evaluation, and self-criticism are reduced. A final and crucial aspect of experiential learning is that learner's also reflect upon their learning experience. Not only are learning conditions intended to provide for learning that reflects the abilities and interests of learners, but the process of learning itself becomes a focus: learners are to become engaged in analysis and reflection of their learning and the tasks they perform, so that they develop metacognitive awareness of their learning. The rationale behind this is that learner's can move toward autonomous learning, since they develop the ability to monitor their progress, and change their approach and strategies according to the needs and problems that arise. As Kohonen notes 'simple everyday experience is not sufficient for learning. It must also be observed and analyzed consciously...and reflection must in turn be followed by testing new hypotheses in order to obtain further experience' (Kohonen 1992: 17).

To facilitate this in the institution (Roger's focuses on the tertiary institution, but argues that it can be applied to any level), he suggests the use of negotiated 'contracts' between learners and instructors, the provision of the widest possible range of resources, giving learners the power to play a role in the forming learning programs, and the establishment of conditions of maximal human interaction among peers, instructors and faculties<sup>2</sup>. In this way, learners are given reign to be creative problem solvers, as well as develop self-disciplined and critical approaches to their learning tasks.

In some ways radical – for its day, and arguably for current times as well – Rogers' proposal is neither too romantic nor overly idealist. In return for their 'freedom', for example, learners are charged with being responsible for their studies. It asks that they be responsible for evaluating their learning needs and setting their problems throughout their program. In encouraging learners to set their own goals (and again Rogers is not idealist, and suggests that instructors negotiate goals with learners, given that learners may set themselves too great or too small a task), learners are held to them and evaluated against them<sup>3</sup>. And in permitting such freedom, Rogers is not expecting all students to become radical learners overnight: his model happily acknowledges that some learners will choose traditional presentation, instruction and evaluation methods.

Kohonen (1992) has offered a translation of experiential learning theory for the field of foreign language pedagogy, drawing on a model described by Kolb 1984. The model sets out four principles of learning in relation to two dimensions:

1. 'prehension' of experience through a) concrete involvement (apprehension) and

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<sup>2</sup> Because the model Roger's outlines is meant specifically for psychology departments, and four-year tertiary degrees, some features, such as selecting students on the basis of their interests (rather than marks) in the subject in the first instance, and expecting them to publish in professional journals, though not impossible, are less likely candidates for a similar model in FL departments, where languages might be obligatory.

<sup>3</sup> Section 8.2.3 will comment on the notions of problems and negotiation in FLL contexts.

b) abstract conceptualization (comprehension) and 2. transformation of experience through c) reflective observation and d) active experimentation. It is through the process of 'recycling' these learning approaches, argues Kohonen, that linguistic rules can be learned.

This raises the most questionable aspect of experiential learning, namely, how the notion of 'experience' is interpreted, and what types of experience are held to be of pedagogical worth in a foreign language learning context. As Kohonen's version reveals, although the tenets of experiential learning can be applied to the FLT setting, it does not necessarily have an impact on content, or how the learning problem is conceived, since much of the learning challenge presumably is the internalization of linguistic rules. Though Kohonen does add that experiential learning 'implies encouraging authentic language use which involves the learner' (1992: 27), and that learners' reflection on the target language should include metalinguistic awareness on the nature of human communication, much of the learning problem – learning grammar – continues to be the same.

Nonetheless, this is a matter of interpretation, and with the addition of a well-developed and considered conception of acculturation, experiential learning and its principles are worthy additions to a foreign language teaching framework, fitting neatly with sociocultural theory as well as constructivist theory in emphasizing interaction, genuine activity and the learning process (rather than product).

### **5.3.2 Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative (or cooperative) learning is another pedagogical approach that is related to (social) constructivism in that 'assumes learning occurs among persons rather than between a person and things' (Bruffee 1986: 787) Rather than 'interacting' solely with learning materials, collaborative learning theory draws on research that suggests that 'Students learn better through non-competitive collaborative group work than in highly individualized and competitive classrooms' (Bruffee 1986: 787).



Like the experiential pedagogical model, the rationale of which is often forwarded in tandem with the cooperative model, cooperative learning aims to dispel the competitiveness inherent in behaviorist style instruction, in which individual learners are pitted against each other to hierarchize their level of knowledge. Instead the structuring of teams and small groups is intended to create an environment of 'positive interdependence' (Kohonen 1992), so that members feel shared and joint responsibility and commitment to succeed in the learning objectives that, preferably, they themselves have set.

There are other benefits of small groups. When groups (of two to four learners) are heterogeneously structured so that learners of various abilities and strengths work together, help and feedback is more accessible and immediate through peer mediation. In the same vein, small groups can provide more opportunity for personal and face to face interaction, communication practice, discussion and mutual discovery. Teams can be left to work independently and at their own pace, but they also therefore demand more accountability on each student's part, as he or she must contribute to the shared goal if it is to be mutually beneficial to learner as well as group (Kohonen 1992). Learners likewise risk less embarrassment when asking questions or speaking in the target language. Criteria of success and evaluation in terms of goal-completion can also be left for learners to organize and negotiate.

Of course there are also potential pitfalls of organizing cooperative learning groups. For example, as much as they are touted for fostering harmonious and positive learning conditions, it is also possible that the possibility of personal clashes increases. Similarly, they do not necessarily diminish competitiveness, and these two factors may well result in less motivation among certain students. Team work may also not suit all learning styles and preferences. But these negative aspects can be offset simply by not enforcing learners to undertake team work, but to provide it as a choice among those learners who feel they would benefit from it.

#### **5.4 Neurological Perspectives on Epistemology and Learning**

In a move away from epistemological theory and pedagogical models, it is worthwhile and important to turn to neurological research, which allows us to understand learning and epistemological processes at the biological level. While it may at first seem to be reducing the concern to purely cognitive interests, such research has, perhaps surprisingly, largely turned out to support sociocultural learning theory, and, as others argue, constructivist learning theory as well.

##### **5.4.1 Neurological Development and Architecture**

Research at the biological and neuroanatomical levels has provided fascinating insights into the ways humans interact with the world. Technology such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) has allowed scientists to trace neurological activity during various tasks, as well as map information transmission within the brain. And to have even a basic understanding of the structure, functioning and sheer complexity of the brain is thought-provoking, and indeed awe inspiring.

Moreover, contrary to many expectations, analyses of the brain's structure contribute largely to an argument in favor of environmental influences of learning in the nature/nurture debate:

The total number of genes in the human is placed between about 200,000 as a low and about 1,000,000 as a very high estimate. The total number of neuronal interconnections in the human brain is now estimated to be between 100,000,000,000,000 and 1,000,000,000,000,000. 'The genes' simply could not carry enough information to specify even a fraction of these connections, leaving 'the environment' with an enormous task (Hundert 1989: 237).

Unfortunately, space does not permit a closer review of the fascinating research into how the brain develops in the human, and how we have come to understand the 'contribution of things' to our thoughts and understanding, and the 'contribution of thoughts to things' as Hundert (1989) puts it. There are several points of interest however, that bear on the purposes of this chapter.

### *Coherence*

Neuroscience lends support to coherence rather than correspondence theories of representation (Hundert 1989; Forrester and Jantzie 2002). This is because the functioning of the brain is separated into a number of systems which are independent from each other, and which therefore require active synthesis (i.e. a form of mediation) in order to co-operate, and thus develop representations and understanding of the exterior world.

Thus, humans have *input systems* which are separated into two components: information 'transducers' (the organs of sense, such as the eyes) and information 'analyzers' (the nervous system, such as the optic nerve) that are independent from each other. The brain in turn is seen as the *central processing system*<sup>4</sup>, which needs to manipulate and synthesize the incoming information 'in all sorts of interesting ways: remembering the information, believing it, expecting it, comparing it, ignoring it, etc.' (Hundert 1989: 191).

Input systems are autonomous, and operate independently, as they can only process only one type of information: the eyes receive and analyze only visual information, the ears only sonic and so on, and they do so in ignorance of what other input systems are doing. In turn, the input and central processing system are also mostly independent, and do not have direct access to each other<sup>5</sup>. That is, while the input system converts incoming information, it does not categorize it any way. Conversely, the central processing system, which does manipulate the information meaningfully, does not have direct access to the input system.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hundert is drawing on Fodor's (1983) model of the mind in which Fodor describes the necessary components and their properties that any intelligent being (Fodor's interest is artificial intelligence) would need in order to function. The irony that the discussion here refers to computational terminology, when one aim here is to move away from it, has not been lost. However, it must be noted that we are talking here about the architecture, rather than the actual processing, of the brain.

<sup>5</sup> This is a general statement, as there is a degree of overlap. Hundert also goes on to stress that the faculties of sense are not as 'passive' as is implied by their description, and he points to important research showing how the two systems require 'feedback' from each other (see 207-210)

<sup>6</sup> There are a number of scientific and deductive explanations that attest to this vital property of the human nervous system as a whole. The first reason the input system can be seen to be ignorant of the central processing system is shown in the fact that humans continue to perceive illusions after they *know* them to be illusions: a stick continues to appear bent in water even when we know it is still

Representations, then, are not caused by the direct and 'dumb' delivery of the information our senses send us. Not only is the 'brute data' physically converted and analyzed by our input systems, so that it actually changes in format (e.g. sound waves to electric signals), but by the time it has been processed in the cortex it has been categorized, remembered, compared, in short made meaningful so, that it can in no way said to be to exactly match the original source of information: 'the information presented to Understanding for synthesis into our experience of the world 'looks' *nothing like* the real world (Hundert 1989: 215 emphasis in original) Instead, neuroscientific research shows that the operations of our brains create representations that are coherent with the external world<sup>7</sup>.

### *Plasticity of the Brain*

The nature/nurture debate continues to lean in favor of the 'nurture' side when one considers the developmental processes of the brain, particularly after birth. Whereas the pro-nature or nativist argument holds to the idea that the brain is pre-equipped to deal with the environment, and is pre-programmed to determine our experiences and behaviors, research has shown not only that the environment 'activates' these programs, but plays a significant role in shaping them.

Hundert refers to the work of Hubel and Wiesel, winners of the Nobel Prize, who conducted perceptual experiments on new-born laboratory animals and who were able to show that environmental conditions play an active role in the distribution of brain cells during critical periods of development, thus confirming what many had

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straight; two lines appear unequal when measurements prove them to be of equal length, as with the arrows in the well-known Müller-Lyer illusion

<sup>7</sup> Hundert's thesis is that humans universally perceive the world: 'Coherence is not a personal, individual coherence, but an intersubjective coherence which is relative to the entire biology of our species and the world' (1989: 274). However, Hundert is not making objectivist claims, and in fact discusses at length the notion of cultural relativity, especially in moral and ethical terms. Thus, while colour is naturally dividable along a spectrum, the perception of depth and shape is cultural (for example, people whose culture has no straight lines are not fooled by the Müller-Lyer illusion. The illusion is explained by the experience of living in and among square structures [rooms and buildings] so that our perception analyzes lines and angles as obtuse or acute). Hundert makes the following clarification: 'There may be a "cultural relativism" about the way we *see* the world (or enjoy art or music), but there is a universal coherence about what can count as *knowledge* of at least some aspects of the world' (1989: 273 emphasis in original)

only been able to speculate from observations of visually impaired humans – that the brain at certain periods of development is ‘plastic’, and moulded by the external world.

*Re-entrant Signalling*

Neurons do not work in isolation from each other, and in fact operate in groups, so that there are *extrinsic connections* between cells in one group to cells in another group, and *intrinsic connections* in which information is passed from cell to cell within a group<sup>8</sup>. With this in mind, Hundert refers to the work of Edelman (1978), another Nobel laureate, to develop a theory of how neuronal groups provide the basis for memory, learning and even self-conscious experience.

Edelman’s theory is that groups of cells are formed during development by learning to work collectively to form primary ‘repertoires’ of functions which have adapted to specific signals. Following a Darwinian model of selection, groups that have better adapted to specific signals are more likely to be chosen to deal with subsequent repetitions of similar input. Thus hierarchies of function among neuronal groups that develop ‘secondary repertoires’ after repeated selection and ‘sharp tuning’ emerge (Hundert 1989: 249-50).

One of the important features of the emergence of secondary repertoires is that signals ‘*need not be confined to external “sensory”, but may include re-entrant inputs from the brain itself*’ (Hundert 1989: 249 emphasis in original). What appears in fact to happen is that internally stored and recycled signals are sent as ‘feedback’ to be matched against external signals that are fed forward (or ‘upward’), thus facilitating a comparative and historical dimension to memory, and (and this is in fact Hundert’s main interest) the possibility of conscious experience, since in this way ‘there exists a mode for recognition of both the “external world”

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<sup>8</sup> Extrinsic connections, notes Hundert, are typically of the ‘synaptic type,’ while intrinsic connections will have synaptic and non-synaptic connections ‘including various local neuromodulations that can act on a time-scale of minutes to hours, consistent with the formation of short- and long-term memories’ (Hundert 1989: 247).

and the “self experiencing that world” (Hundert 1989: 250). To put it another way, Edelman argues that this ‘feedback’ and ‘feedforward’ signalling is a cause of the emergence of *associative* memory, whereby attributes of the world and meaning are linked in various directions.

#### ***5.4.3 Food for Thought: Discussion of Neurological Findings and Possible Repercussions for Language Learning and Teaching***

One of the most interesting consequences of turning to neuroscientific research is that its discoveries seem ultimately to parallel if not strengthen the constructivist version of learning (Forrester and Jantzie 2002). Indeed, many of the features and processes of neurological development described in this section are clearly reminiscent of constructivist theory as outlined in section 5.3. Features such as flexibility/plasticity, coherence, punctuation/input analysis, and adaptation to the objective world in learning all bear witness to similarities between neurological development and constructivist learning theory.

Any theory of learning (foreign language or otherwise) therefore, would do well to at least consider the description of neurobiological processes offered by scientists, even if the degree of relevance and importance in terms of having direct consequences on pedagogical practice is debatable. There are still large gaps in our understanding of how neural processes and learning are related and, relation or no, what our neurons do is beyond our control. Foss for example provides a more concrete picture of our ignorance, both at the learning and the neural level:

When Sylvie’s teacher says, “No, no, six times eight is forty-eight, not forty-nine,” Sylvie may in the twinkling of an eye shed her error and learn the right answer for good. Neither she, nor her teacher, nor anyone else, has any idea which synaptic connections to weaken or which to strengthen – so how do the neurons know? (Foss 1997: 566)

However, the fact that the environment has been shown to play a crucial role in *shaping* the brain’s structure raises intriguing questions with regard to learning and pedagogy. Neuroscientific discoveries for example, allow us to understand the

biology of enculturation, *but also* the biology of learning – and therefore to some degree the possibility of acculturation – throughout life.

By understanding that various systems are independently operationalized during cognitive processes we can also understand for example, how the ‘mechanics’ of speech and hearing are distinct from their conceptual categorization. That is, because input does not have a perfectly corresponding representation in the cortex, we have grounds for understanding why adults may have a more difficult time of perceiving and learning to pronounce correctly, since the information their input systems receive undergoes a different kind of analysis – and is thereby transformed – in the cortex. (This may work on two levels: not only are the processing systems different, but by more developed stages, the neuron groups called upon to process the information have established repertoires so that subtleties of pronunciation are missed.) This is corroborated by the notion of plasticity, which ceases in most areas of the brain when architectural development slows, so that once perceptual systems have been ‘wired’ to expect certain sounds (meanings, behavioral nuances etc.) it would require nothing short of ‘rewiring’ (a fresh period of plasticity) to enable *more* coherence between input and understanding<sup>9</sup>.

It seems then, that learning another language is not about providing the correct ‘input’, because it is not perceived or conceived in the same way by learners as it is by people whose neuronal pathways have become accustomed to particular sounds and expressions. In other words, ‘input’ – which implies simple information transfer – is never the same for two people. It would also appear that, even in general terms, more mature learners would have little chance in developing the knowledge necessary to communicate in a foreign language (were it not of course for the empirical fact that they do).

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the period of plasticity coincides with Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development as well as with the ‘critical period hypothesis’ (cf. Brown 1987) in SLA research.

But all of this seemingly dire outlook for the second language and culture learner must not overshadow the positive aspects of neuroanatomical development. As much as we have scientific grounds for understanding perhaps *why* more mature learners have difficulty in certain learning areas, we also have scientific grounds for understanding *that* adults are perfectly capable of learning and understanding foreign languages, behaviors and meanings. As has been shown, certain developmental processes associated with abstraction, understanding and learning continue throughout life, which is why Hundert points out that Hegel spoke of the 'becoming of knowledge', rather than the discovery of knowledge (Hundert 1989: 242).

The theory of re-entrant signalling is admittedly more difficult to place in the context of foreign language learning. Nonetheless, some speculation is possible, and the following points are made in this vein. First, information processing and manipulation seems to follow a familiar story – it is not linear but circular, with feedback and feedforward operations taking effect. In conjunction with this is the need for the neuron groups to form *associations*, so that signals can be compared, recognized and recalled. This suggests two things. First, it suggests that the types of associations the brain makes must be a result of the history of the individual learner's experience with the environment, thereby making learning and the development of concepts a less than predictable affair. Secondly, the notion of 'associations' itself suggests that a variety of experiences and perspectives are required for associations to form – and this too seems to be coherent with a dialogic and 'indefinitely deferred' understanding of learning and meaning. As Forrester and Jantzie write: 'The construction of knowledge is essentially the growing of connections between the neural modules that contain individual memories' (2002: web page). Thus they argue:

Because the process of creating connections between ideas and memories is essentially carried out through a process of rehearsal and review, learners should be encouraged to review knowledge that is being learned and attempt to build connections to that knowledge that is already easily retrieved from long-term memory. Such cognitive tools as narration, story-telling, constructing metaphors,



and making comparisons are strategies that help to build and maintain connections. (Forrester and Jantzie 2002: n/p)

Finally, while the constructivist learning model (neuronal constructivism) argues for a reduction in complexity, with a gradual increase, this does not mean that an initial reduction of language into grammatical units will be of benefit to all learners. The fact that grammar is *a* representation or version of what language is means that such representation will not accord with the learner's own development and abstraction. Any reduction in complexity must suit the learner's representational and conceptual needs, therefore, and not a model of language that is presented as the corresponding and true model. In other words, reducing complexity should not be about choosing *one* aspect of (say) a text (such as its vocabulary) at the expense of others, but quite the opposite in making all aspects of it *available* for analysis and consideration.

### **5.5 Rhizomatic Learning: an Introduction?**

Make a map, not a tracing (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 12)

Although they are practically unknown in applied linguistics and even relatively rare in educative philosophy (for exceptions see McMahon 1993; Morss 2000), Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, especially that of the rhizome can be used with regard to conceiving of the learning process, even if it may appear a little too abstract for some tastes. While the concept of the rhizome is used to explain the movement of the sign, it is however also arguably applicable to talking about the learning process: if signification is rhizomatic, then so too must be the developing concepts of actors and learners.

It has been argued that learning involves a process of socialization, and this implies first of all that learners will come to appropriate the representations, behaviors and skills of those who directly or indirectly teach them. At the same time however, there are individual and personal/autobiographical processes whereby the relative distinctiveness of each learner is ensured. At the neurological level for example

synapses operate to make connections and form concepts and ideas etc. that are unique to each person, and at the social level too humans all have unique historical and spatial trajectories. And while researchers may be able to categorize and analyze what occurs during socialization it is much more difficult to make a claim as to how semiosis – the moment of meaning or understanding – happens in the learner.

The notion of rhizomatic learning puts paid to the idea of (always) direct teleological processes of cause and consequence, of teaching X and learning X. Because there is no perfect correspondence between reality and our understanding of it, nor even a perfect correspondence between our understanding of reality and our description of it, pedagogy cannot expect to impart its versions and descriptions as though they are to be mirrored in the minds of learners. Any attempt at presentation is in fact a representation of a representation, a trace of a trace. Yet pedagogy demands that learners are in some way supposed to make duplicates. It is a logical extension therefore to conclude that there can be no ultimate or complete knowledge of the language or the cultures in which it is found. The learner of another culture must get a set of representations that approximates and is coherent with the processes and patterns of the target culture and language s/he studies: she must appropriate the 'words' of others, but need not be deluded that there is a final arbiter from which to appropriate.

The upshot of this way of thinking, for the language learner as well as the language institution is that free and unconstrained learning spaces must be provided in which the learner can 'map' his or her representations:

you don't know what you can make a rhizome with, you don't know which subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 251).

All of this suggests a need for conditions in which 'lines of flight' are not prevented or cut short, but instead are encouraged: the more resources and experiences that are

made available, the more chance the learner has of developing a deeper, one might say three-dimensional web of socio-cultural associations. This unknown process of knowledge and learning is one that pedagogues and researches must not only be able to cope with in theory, but acknowledge in practice.

*Rhizomatic Foreign Language and Culture Learning: a Justification*

An acknowledgment of the relativity and political ontology of (contextualized) meanings, and the fact that actors 'stem from' their social environments legitimizes a 'rhizomatic approach' to FLT, in that we cannot expect learners to adopt, adapt to or subject themselves to pretreated transcendent object: there is no epistemologically valuable, teachable object: 'Culture'. Students discovering – and being taught - meanings, patterns, values or their linguistic needs rhizomatically is thus not only ethical in institutional terms, but is also warranted in the sense that what they learn will both be relevant to themselves, 'deep' and 'allied' to the foreign culture: 'the tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, purely alliance' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 25). Inserting oneself in the study of culture, one inserts oneself in its ongoing construction. One studies multiplicity as a multiplicity oneself. Garfinkel's notion of culture as text is apt, but only so far, in that no *one* writes a text: neither object nor subject of the text have a hold on any absolute, but neither can they be: 'there is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide the subject' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 8).

The rhizome concept echoes that of Bakhtin's heteroglossia and intertextuality. How is it different enough to warrant special attention? Because Bakhtin focuses on 'texts' as written products and inter-textual analysis likewise often confines itself to finding the *specific* antecedent texts which are referenced in text one under analysis. While this is useful, rhizomatic conditions of learning do not confine themselves specifically to texts, nor even to language, but to intersubjective and conceptual histories which the learner experiences and develops.

## **5.6 Summary and Discussion: Epistemological Principles of Foreign Language and Culture Learning**

This chapter has been concerned with understanding learning processes, with a view to incorporating such an understanding into the developing pedagogical model of this thesis. It has focused on the learner as someone who comes to develop concepts, situated knowledge and pragmatic understanding in ways that are particular to that learner.

But the argument has not 'turned subjectivist', or become involved in the dichotomizing process which sets actors against structures. While learning is fundamentally, necessarily and integrally a social process (and a learner can only learn what is socially described, constructed, validated and exchanged), it is the learner's social existence in a unique historical trajectory, in which not only distinct contexts and opportunities to learn and perform are made variously available, but, concomitantly, where his or her cognitive, conceptual, intellectual and even neurological development is ultimately mysterious, complex and unpredictable enough that warrants an approach which acknowledges him or her as an individual.

Though we can appreciate the complexity of the learning process in terms of how the learner comes to form representations in the mind, research and theory has been able to establish the kinds of conditions and environments, from cognitive, psychological and affective perspectives, that are amenable and favorable to learning. In sum, what we call learning occurs when the learner (in no particular order):

- needs to solve a problem,
- does not feel psychologically threatened,
- is present among other people of equal or greater ability,
- participates in genuine actions and practices, defined as contexts in which speakers have motives beyond those of learning and practicing utterances in imaginary situations, is provided with feedback, preferably immediate,

- is allowed to explore and experiment with the learning task according to his or her interests,
- is presented with personally relevant learning objectives,
- can make use of various resources and tools suited to favored learning styles and approaches, both conscious and unrecognized,
- actively pursues rather than passively absorbs learning objectives,
- has the guidance of others as well as of concepts with which to approach learning problems
- can reflect upon his or her learning development, strategies, and styles

To amalgamate the theories of Vygotsky and Piaget and their derivatives, neurological perspectives, as well as Bakhtin's dialogical argument that we assimilate *other's* words, allows one to conclude that not only is the environment a *pre-condition* of learning, but that, more importantly, a *peopled* environment is a pre-condition of learning. It further suggests that learning and meaning must have an expressive interpersonal component to it. Indeed, here we might recall Deleuze and Guattari's stress not only on *expression* as being bound to content and meaning, but also their stress on the *face* as the 'wall' which the signifier needs for meaning: the expressions (facial bodily, linguistic and so on), responses and projections of others provide learner's with learning clues and cues.

While in Chapter 1 it was noted that there is general agreement that being immersed in a foreign culture neither guarantees linguistic nor cultural competence therefore, agreement with this statement depends in fact on how the notion of immersion is defined. Clearly, being a resident in a foreign culture, but living within an expatriate community or in some way in a socially sheltered manner is not amenable to cultural and communicative learning. But at the same time, practically all of the perspectives on learning in this chapter would suggest that interacting in a consistent, personally relevant and significant way, in various practices, with people who can provide some sort of guidance and feedback (and that can include everybody, when one learns how to ask!) is a crucial learning condition. But for

pedagogical purposes, this need not be seen to be a context restricted to foreign culture immersion. Arguably, with effort, imagination and will, as well as with a properly understood purpose, such conditions can be 'artificially' established.

To argue that learning should be 'personally relevant' requires elaboration. The notion of relevance or personal significance is all too often interpreted in foreign language teaching as needing to have 'conversations' about the students' interests in terms of hobbies, films, books, etc., about their families or about current, possibly age-specific 'issues' so that pedagogy can feel contented by having 'catered' to the student. Activities devised from such a perspective only continue to focus on object-language, on filling in the subject ('things to talk about') while in truth continuing to practice linguistic structure: the enforced and artificial nature of these conversations ensures anything but engagement and interest. Moreover, personal significance is not all about interests and 'what I did in the summer holidays' but about the kinds of relations, as social beings learners enter into. Personal significance is establishing, developing, considering and maintaining relationships, so it concerns less what is talked about than how. Again, personal significance is as much about expression, not content.

To stress the importance of an interpersonal environment does not necessarily undermine the value of other forms of learning, such as from (text)books, visual material, or computer programs, especially since Vygotsky's notion of mediation through the use of tools (as one form of mediation) has been described as one characteristic of learning. Thus, without himself referring to Vygotsky, Rogers's principle that as many resources as possible should be made available to cater to all learning styles and preferences and strengths is warranted.

However, it must also be realized that while learning is mediated, and requires the presence of tools, signs and others, this does not mean that understanding and knowledge are direct and identical representations of external 'input'. There is no knowing or preordaining the types of internal connections and meanings individuals

develop as a result of mediation, because a contingent and necessary factor is the individual circumstances, context and relations – in short, histories – that are inherent in conceptual formation. Vygotsky's work therefore should not be used to lend support to methodologies in the self-congratulatory manner they are often applied: the *process* of learning should not be confused with *methodology* that has been designed to facilitate it, especially when methodology is no more than different means to cover the same content. Process, instead, refers to the unpredictable ways that knowledge is triggered and added to the developing repertoires (and this might here refer to conceptual, performative, social, neurological repertoires) of the learning individual.

The implicit aim in SLR is that once 'the' process of natural acquisition is discovered, that replicating this process is par for the course in the classroom, that learners given the right content at the right time will reproduce the process. For this reason, while it is indeed important to gain a conceptual and cognitive foothold on the process of second language acquisition, of learning in general and of acculturation, it is in fact also important to be aware that this information may have little or no bearing on the learning model that learners are expected 'logically' to follow. That is, it is important to be vigilant against assuming that the models and patterns of learning that have been discovered can be replicated in instruction. Seeing patterns of learning does not reveal the process of learning itself, nor does it make those patterns (re)producible, or make teaching strategies automatically obvious.

Though Vygotsky and Piaget concentrated on the cognitive development of children, thereby throwing into doubt the relevance of their work on acculturation for more mature learners, their theories continue to be useful because it is possible to divide learning into two types of process: 'natural' – that which 'just happens' as a result of interaction and mediation, and reflective – where learners can actively consider their learning strategies, concepts, preferences, strengths and interests and so on. While both types of learning are possible from relatively young ages, the fact

that adults are more able to undertake active learning works to their advantage, and for this reason both types of learning should be facilitated.

Perhaps this is one reason to suggest that it is also important to begin reconsidering what is meant when we talk about 'creating conditions' and to establish the idea of creating an 'environment' for learning. To 'create conditions' for learning implies a more forceful, strategic, urgent and linear understanding of the learning process. It implies that instruction focuses specifically on a learning target, and then sets about ensuring that it can be met by following the strategies and strategic logic that have been created by pedagogy and pedagogues. To create an environment where learning *can* (not must) take place however, implies a much freer context. Where in artificially created 'conditions' learning can come to be seen as a product of directed action that has been determined by someone's particular educational vision, the notion of an environment can be seen as a conceptual shift, and may be seen as opening the learning space for an individual's active exploration, as well as for learning that is allowed to 'just happen,' where there is less pressure to conform to pre-established pedagogical norms and demands, and in short, where there is 'freedom to learn'.

Understanding is a practical and local achievement. This applies for every moment, though of course background knowledge and historical association play a large part in facilitating the process, and for filling in the gaps of perception. Thus we return to context. But this does not mean that each context is entirely new each time, or forgotten for subsequent interactions. Local understanding becomes of course part of one's history, and in each interaction and experience we make comparative references to prior interactions so that we develop social repertoires of meaning-making, action, and recognizable behavior. We do not learn or acquire each repertoire individually or separately, completely, or in stages, however. As in daily life, we move across each interaction and context randomly. Localities and contexts are layered, cross-referential. The development of performative competence and understanding is sedimentary, not cellular. It is horizontal (moving across contexts,



spreading, tentacular) *and* vertical (building 'up', constructing), rather than vertical alone, and for this reason it is mistaken to construe of language learning as the acquisition of individual blocks of meaning, skills, or rules, or as the acquisition of a separate systems of communication, or the memorization of phrases belonging to particular contexts (such as language for business or other 'specific' purposes). Such contexts and discourses may of course be examined separately, but they still need horizontal reference even for these to develop.

From an epistemological perspective then, one is not learning language, one is learning how and what to know, how to infer (and imply). One is also always learning how to learn. This should be borne in mind as a primary aim for the development of facilities, tasks, problems etc. in L2 pedagogy. Rather than conceive of the pedagogical task as being one of provision or dispersal of knowledge, it should conceive of itself as the provision of experience and space that allows strategic access to problems and needs, as well as guidance and feedback, for these are the mediated operations of learning.

### *Culture Shock*

Having acknowledged that an environment in which the learner does not feel threatened or psychologically confronted is amenable to learning, as well as continued motivation and interest (see also chapter 3), a potentially contradictory position is that of Piaget's notion of equilibration. This notion would suggest that culture shock is not only a natural process, but a necessary one, and that learners should be exposed to it in order to construct new meanings and behaviors, since according to this principle learning arises out of conflict and mistakes. Hundert agrees, quoting Miller: (1983: 28-9): 'there is no knowledge ...until a mistake has been made and corrected. It is this sense of avoiding mistakes that marks knowledge.' (Hundert, 1989: 179)

In foreign language pedagogy too, some commentators have questioned the protectiveness implicit in some practices and approaches: 'We need to identify and

clarify the limitations of the 'avoidance of conflict' approach; to recognize struggle and tension as productive rather than problematic – necessary preconditions for change' (Carr 1999: 106). Some time ago, Nostrand (1966) argued that measured doses of culture shock were important for the process of cross-cultural awareness. Adler (1972) too argues that culture-shock could be viewed more positively. Brown therefore also concludes that it is important that learners be allowed to go through the stages of culture shock: 'We should not expect learners to deny the anger, the frustration, the helplessness and homelessness they feel' (Brown 1987: 132)

There is a way in which the potential contradiction between the need for psychological safety and the need for some degree of culture shock can be resolved however, if one considers various contexts in which psychological conflicts arise. In the classroom, it is often the case that learner's are called upon to provide an answer to a question or request in front of all the other students, possibly causing personal threat akin to stage fright – the learner's focus is no longer on the question but on the perceived attention of all others, and the subsequent pressure is not to look foolish or ignorant. In other social situations, learners are first of all less likely to be exposed to an audience 'waiting for the right answer.' Communicative and cross-cultural problems, whether solved (or not) with lighthearted patience or frustration, remain as problems in their own right – to get one's point across, to behave appropriately, to complete an errand or task. While both situations require the learner's performance, the fact that problems arising in the latter situation remain *communicative* and *cultural* problems reduces the personal threat, and simultaneously creates a condition in which mistakes, tensions and conflicts can be addressed.

### ***5.6.1 Principles of Language and Culture Learning***

Clearly, one of the core principles from which language pedagogy should proceed is that because practical mastery or performative competence involves a multitude of factors, variables and dynamics, there is so much more the learner of a foreign language doesn't know – and therefore needs to (get to) know *in some way* – than

just the language, defined and treated as a tool to apply straightforwardly to any given situation. Because practical mastery and the logic of practice depend so entirely on history (or histories) internalized, embodied, appropriated and produced, we must acknowledge that there are profound epistemological complexities in attempting somehow to create, replicate or represent 'a history' that can result in similar practical mastery.

Following this acknowledgement, a summary of the most important principles that emerge from this chapter, in conjunction and addition to those of the previous chapter, can be summarized thus:

1. Learning is a process of transformation, involving the development of networks of associations. In the case of learning language and cultural performance, these associations are formed in relation to signs and their public interpretations.
2. Learning can be guided and facilitated, but not controlled or determined in the often linear and module-like fashion with which it is often conceived. Thus foreign language pedagogy must acknowledge, accept and encourage the 'free play' of learning.
3. Content cannot always be predetermined or pre-organized according to predicted learning patterns, even if there are learning patterns, because there is no necessary direct link between method and uptake/acquisition, let alone 'appearance' and 'reality'.
4. Learning therefore is 'timeless' in that the rate and duration of acquisition, learning or understanding is not governed by specified or specifiable duration.
5. It is possible however, to outline a number of factors that must be present for learning opportunities to be maximized. They include among others (as outlined above) interpersonal interaction and guidance, feedback, problem solving, the use of concepts, the provision of various mediating tools and resources, active learning conditions and experience, and the possibility to pursue personally identified interests.

6. Foreign language learners must be provided with means to understand their own learning processes and strategies, as well as be allowed to discuss, develop and conceive what it means to learn another language.

In sum, apart from their compatibility (with poststructural perspectives as with each other), the learning theories discussed in this chapter were chosen for two reasons. First, they go some way toward acknowledging and establishing the fact that there is no perfect correspondence between what is real - or determined as representing what is real - and what is actually acquired or understood. That is, these theories suggest that there is no perfect correspondence in terms of reality and knowledge that can be pedagogically packaged. Second, these theories all imply that it is more honest to provide a learning environment in which unpredictability, flexibility, chance, as well as guidance, encouragement, and analysis are given greater emphasis than is very often the case.

Both the notions of correspondence (or lack thereof) and honesty are discussed in light of the consequences they have at the institutional level of instruction, the topics of the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Institutional Practices, Ethics and the Representation of Knowledge**

The postmodern 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984: xxiv) has had a profound impact on how science and its methods of discovery are viewed. It has also resulted in a concern as to how education is conceived in terms of 'delivering' and 'representing' knowledge. Thus, not only is knowledge and the manner in which it is constructed considered to be interested, and emerging out of perspectives that are not objective, but the educational institution is seen as one in which hegemonic, dominant and ultimately oppressive (to some learners and groups) perspectives are reproduced and reinforced in such construction. Questions concerning the authority, legitimacy and ethics of disciplinary, scientific and pedagogical knowledge-construction have been raised. Scientific and disciplinary knowledge is seen as the product of subjective and institutional discourses which privilege politically and ideologically won truths: the resulting awareness of multiple perspectives and standpoints has led to a 'crisis of meaning' (Trend 1995) in education, which traditionally has been characterized by practices that are directed to supposedly homogeneous groups of learners, present a logical 'purity' of that which has been taught, and standardize learning, teaching and assessment according to dominant ideologies and positions, as well as suit administrative, rather than learners' needs.

Throughout this thesis the linguistic paradigm has enjoyed a virtually exclusive authority in foreign language research and teaching. In this chapter the theme on how the interests and politics of disciplines drive and construct knowledge and learning objects and methods will be developed, with discussions this time centering not on how the individual constructs or acquires knowledge, but on how knowledge is sought and disseminated at the bigger scale of educational institution and academic or scientific disciplines. Thus, the ethical question herein is concerned with the 'theory of what we are doing, not ... a theory of what there is' (Deleuze 1991: 133).

In other words, the focus will be on representation and representational knowledge, as well on relations between various disciplines, namely (applied) linguistics and language teaching. There are a number of purposes behind such an exposé, all of which revolve around the subject of ethics. Primarily, this chapter argues (in keeping with coherence rather than correspondence position of knowledge and reality) that what is considered 'language' by linguistics is not necessarily the same 'language' of which learners need to develop performative competence. By extension, it is argued that the relation between applied linguistics and FLT is not direct or 'given,' and that although what applied linguistics discovers as the properties of language and the characteristics of second language learning may be useful to some, the overall conception of how language is defined and treated is not an ontological 'truth' but an understanding that has been developed with particular perspectives and interests. To put it more briefly, the questions this chapter asks are: On what basis are curricula, contents and methods chosen? How can we know that what is chosen actually does what it is intended to do?

In turn, this chapter is also about acknowledgment. It calls for a need in the field of foreign language pedagogy to acknowledge the politicized processes by which research paradigms and methods are created, knowledge objects (i.e. language) are constructed and teaching methods are legitimized, validated and endorsed, so that it can begin to establish a more ethical and honest way of performing. At the same time

however, it provides an opportunity for this thesis to acknowledge that it itself is engaged in that very process.

The philosophy of science and education are, like the topics in previous chapters, broad and complex, and could easily be focal points of theses in their own right. While space does not permit full justice to be done to these subjects, this aim of this chapter is to establish the main principles of the ethics of educational practices in the foreign language and learning context toward which an ontologically, epistemologically and (now) ethically coherent and justified framework can be developed.

## **6.1 Institutional Legitimization of Knowledge and Practices**

In the past few decades a number of scholars have had widespread influence by arguing that the knowledge science presents is not representative of a given or transcendent truth, but rather is a result of cultural and disciplinary ideologies, logics, methods, and ways of conceiving problems. The list of well-known names includes Kuhn, Feyerabend, Rorty, Lyotard, Adorno, Marcuse, as well as Bourdieu, who, while not necessarily seeking to dismiss scientific knowledge and progress *per se*, or deny that what science dis- or uncovers is not real, have undermined its image as free of dogma, politics and ideology, thereby stripping it of its unquestioned legitimacy and prestige. Truth and knowledge, to them, is as much a creation and an achievement as it is a process of discovery.

### **6.1.1 *How Facts and Truth are Won: the Positivist Victory and its Critique***

Scientific methodology in general has, since the Enlightenment, been considered to be the true path to knowledge acquisition. The knowledge it acquires, in turn, is considered to be transcendent, representing the world as it is, independent of human interpretations and semiotic intervention. The foundational principles upon which this

objective empirical orientation rests therefore, includes among others<sup>1</sup>: a) the validity of observation, in which the phenomenon observed is held to be separate from and uninfluenced by language and culture, b) the independence of theory and observation, whereby theoretical propositions 'must correspond to elements in the phenomenal world (Anderson 1996: 130), c) quantification, so that analysts can bring the logic of mathematics to bear on observations, d) conventionalism, whereby the rules of observation are universally agreed upon, e) the primacy of prediction, and f) generalizability, in order to move away from the 'eternal present' and into transcendent knowledge.

### *Strategies of Legitimacy and Exclusion*

Despite the emphasis on impersonality and objectivity implied by these principles however, critiques of the scientific paradigm have focused on the ideological, hegemonical and political exertion the scientific project has made in order to advance itself in an effort to show that the knowledge it produces conforms to the principles it has established. Questions as to what, how, and why a phenomenon is to be studied (or an object constructed as a phenomenon) are answered from the position of power and legitimacy science has come to assume in its very struggles to achieve power and legitimacy *in* or *as* a field of knowledge. That is, disciplines and subdisciplines *compete* for supremacy both in theoretical, methodological and practical terms, and aim to establish as genuine, real, or significant things they identify as phenomena (Anderson 1996).

There are a number of ways that disciplines of science establish their predominance, or carve out their validated domains, both within and beyond scientific discourse. Lyotard (1984) has famously argued that science has established its legitimacy by appropriating the characteristics of narrative and rhetoric, using these techniques, ironically, to argue that it is the sole provider of knowledge, and in order to formalize

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<sup>1</sup> This summary is adapted from Anderson 1996. Other principles he notes are the unity of science, and the literalness of meaning of observation.



the propositions, methods, practices and results in which it engages. As Croissant notes, 'When "understanding" and "explanation" are institutionally legitimated formal knowledge is the outcome' (1998: 150).

Yet with the poststructuralist critique of established traditional and foundational dichotomies, the clear-cut separation between science and fiction is seen as no more than the different manner in which texts are presented or structured:

In the postmodern terrain, critical analysis is turned from the texts of fiction to the texts of knowledge: indeed whether the texts are "fiction" or "knowledge" is a distinction of convention accomplished in the texts themselves (Hall 1990: 339).

However, because narrative and rhetoric have been considered as secondary and supplementary to (supposedly) objective observation and rationality, and indeed, have been considered as having separate functions since the time of Aristotle (Bernard-Donals 1998), science has repudiated its involvement with, or use of, the techniques of fiction. Yet even to deny, implicitly or explicitly, the narrative-like manner with which it constructs knowledge as much as it discovers it, that is by needing to *convince* as much as to show, science has to enter into (always political) language games, which eventually serve to weaken its role as representing its self imposed ideal of objective truth (Bernard-Donals 1998).

The same applies to the divisions of scientific fields as it does to the scientific mentality as a whole, and another way in which science has come to usurp the 'knowledge producing' task is not only by denying its own use of rhetoric, but by using rhetoric - among other strategies - to exclude or denounce other approaches, scientific or not. Shotter and Gergen write:

scientific enclaves operate in much the same way as religions, committing themselves to given ontologies...coding the world in their terms...and subtly reinforcing participants for remaining within a "framework" while persecuting those who deviate (Shotter and Gergen 1994: 22-23).

Fields and discourses of research and theory thus establish certain logics of practice by which members come to recognize and legitimize each other, and through which they reproduce fundamental assumptions that have become tacit through historical induction:

A philosophical (or scientific, etc.) problem is a problem that philosophers (or scientists) recognize (in both senses) as such (because it is inscribed in the logic of the history of the field and in their dispositions, which are historically constituted by and for membership of the field) and which, by virtue of the specific authority they are recognized as having, has every chance of being very widely recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1993a: 75)

The Frankfurt School, a group of intellectuals who established The Institute for Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung) in Frankfurt in 1923, was also a vocal and unapologetic source of the critique of science, and in particular its positivist ideology. For the Frankfurt School positivism<sup>2</sup> had come to be lauded at the expense of other means of inquiry, and, instead of being *part* of the voice of reason came to be thought of as representing the voice of reason itself, with a paradoxical consequence: "Rather than being the agent of reason, it became its enemy and emerged in the twentieth century as a new form of social administration and domination." (Giroux 1983: 12) Similarly, Lyotard is also quite blunt about the uses of science: 'Scientists, technicians, and instruments' he states, 'are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power' (Lyotard 1984: 46). Indeed, for this reason Lyotard rejects 'homology, or the uniformity of experts and the criterion of efficiency' as terroristic devices (Usher and Edwards 1994: 167).

Marcuse also sees scientific positivism as having assumed its dominance with exclusionist ideology, and outlines the Frankfurt School's understanding of, and position with regard to, the positivist mentality:

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<sup>2</sup> Positivism, notes Anderson (1996: 107), can be subsumed under the larger field of correspondence theory, which continues to dominate scientific thinking. As such, though the term positivism is here used, it may be better to consider it as standing in for scientific practice per se.

Since its first usage, probably in the school of Saint-Simon, the term 'positivism' has encompassed (1) the validation of cognitive thought by experience of facts; (2) the orientation of cognitive thought to the physical sciences as a model of certainty and exactness; (3) the belief that progress in knowledge depends on this orientation. Consequently, positivism is a struggle against all metaphysics, transcendentalisms, and idealisms as obscurantist and regressive modes of thought. To the degree to which the given reality is scientifically comprehended and transformed, to the degree to which society becomes industrial and technological, positivism finds in society the medium for the realization (and validation) of its concepts – harmony between theory and practice, truth and facts. Philosophic thought turns into affirmative thought; the philosophic critique criticizes *within* the societal framework and stigmatizes non-positive notions as mere speculations, dreams or fantasies. (Marcuse 1964: 172)

The myopia of the positivist vision, argues the Frankfurt School, has resulted in a blindness of its own conduct and performance. It has lost the ability to critique itself or the means by which it structures itself normatively. In the positivist view of the world as a consequence, 'Facts become separated from values, objectivity undermines critique, and the notion that essence and appearance may not coincide is lost' (Giroux 1983: 13). With this inability to distinguish reality from interpretation and perspective 'Questions concerning the genesis, development and normative nature of the conceptual systems that select, organise and define the facts appear to be outside the concern of positivist rationality' (Giroux 1983: 14). Finally, positivism has neglected to acknowledge the value system by which it describes the world: 'under the guise of neutrality, scientific knowledge and all theory become rational on the grounds of whether they are efficient, economic or correct. In this case, a notion of methodological correctness subsumes and devalues the complex philosophical concept of truth' (Giroux 1983: 14).

Under the weight of such critique science has suffered a demise (theoretically, at least) of its privilege as a grand narrative. In the postmodern era it has begun to produce its own 'little narratives,' that is, multiple, sometimes contradictory and often conflicting accounts of ostensibly the 'same' phenomena. A paradox has emerged from this however in that whereas traditionally science, in order to optimize its right and power to explain definitively the performance of any given system, required 'that

all the variables affecting the system can be known and calculated and therefore predicted' (Usher and Edwards 1994: 181), 'the more postmodern science finds out, the more it seems that systems cannot exist as predictable entities' (Usher and Edwards 1994: 181). This has served to undermine the notion of unified totality of the world that has been the object of the scientific project since its rise in the age of Enlightenment.

Instead of an ostensibly one-minded and unified march to knowledge and truth then, science has become embroiled in the discourse of economy, obliging it to be accountable in terms of performance, results, efficiency, consumption and exchange, rather than creative exploration (Usher and Edwards 1994: 166). In other words, the motto of science might be seen to be: 'if it won't make money (or augment power), it's not worth researching'. The scientific enterprise has become servile to the flux of supply and demand that characterizes economic exchange. While ideally its basic urge *is* creative and philosophical, seeking to invent new means of understanding, to find new concepts, it is bound by the principles which say that everything must be utilitarian and sellable. To challenge current ways of doing and conceiving things is to face being taken off the shelf, off the curriculum and off the funding list, and, in fearful anticipation of this rejection, science and scientists allied to particular fields and paradigms no longer have the courage or backing to be creative, no longer allowed to take risks or be exploratory: their options are to become 'mainstream' or to disappear into obscurity.

Other ways in which science ensures its survival as a legitimate supplier of officially sanctioned knowledge of the world is by constantly conceiving new problems to solve: 'For a discipline to exist, there must be the possibility of formulating – and of doing so ad infinitum – fresh propositions' (Green 1997: 223) – as long as these 'fresh' propositions emerge out of propositions already condoned. Similarly, science maintains its mystique by continually classifying the world in its terms – and terminology (Rabinow 1986: 244), which serves to cloak its power to exclude other

knowledge forms in the need to describe phenomena to manipulate, formalize, measure and construct propositions about.

### **6.1.2 Representation**

Ontological and epistemological arguments such as those regarding the absence of a transcendental signified, constructivist theory, and even our developing understanding of neurological processes of the brain, have already been shown to support the claim that reality and what we know of it do not exist in a relation of perfect correspondence: in fact such claims are generally accepted in current epistemology (Anderson 1996). Instead, the best we may possibly hope for is a sufficient level of coherence, so that in our interactions with the world (and with each other), our performances and practices *appear* shared, successful, stable and understood.

In scientific discourses, as in daily life, the problem of determining just what is true, or viable of the phenomenal world is generally considered a theoretical matter, and by extension, a normative one, since we must make decisions as to which theory is true for any given problem, paradigm, or moment. It is possible to list the primary problems that we encounter when we hope to provide foundational axioms – from which all other practices and propositions are expected to arise – in the aim to universally determine an object to be studied and discussed, and therefore represented, particularly within an institutional context:

Whatever the phenomenal world is, an independent question arises as to the nature of our engagement with that world. The question of engagement involves three components: 1) a common object that we can 2) identify and reidentify and 3) describe and redescribe (Anderson 1996: 47)

Taking into account the discussions of this and the previous chapters, we can now understand how complex the problem truly is: neither language nor culture are ‘common objects’ (or for that matter autonomous objects at all) for too long, their identification and description are contingent and emerge from various local fields and

discourses dependent on theoretical perspectives and interests, while their re-identification and re-description can only be but traces of the (supposedly) original versions, since each time the same phenomenon is approached or reidentified, it has undergone some kind of transformation, or play. We may bear in mind Baudrillard, for example, who has famously and controversially argued that social activities are no longer 'real in and of themselves' but are undertaken at the service of image (cited in Allan 1998: 25). Thus 'Any representation...is a practical accomplishment of semiotic maneuvering.' (Anderson 1996: 63) It is achieved by those whose representations have been accepted as (more or less) true or at least 'acceptable'.

One uptake of the less-than-corresponding, politically attained depiction of the knowledge object is that it is incumbent for us as researchers and/or teachers to acknowledge that what we *say* we do, and what we *actually* do may well be – indeed probably are – separate things altogether, especially given the fact that we aim to effect some kind of transformation in the 'knowledge' or ability in learners whose minds and thoughts and learning processes we cannot see. That is, as instructors we aim to (re)present constantly shifting systems of meaning to learners whose understanding is likewise undergoing constant change simply as an integral part of its interacting with the world, and thus with the shifting systems within which it operates.

To what degree therefore, can pedagogy be said to exercise the 'natural' or 'obvious' power to represent the learning object, namely linguistic, cultural and performative competence? Any attempt to 'freeze' or frame cultural and linguistic meaning in order to depict representative aspects of them entails a decision regarding what is relevant or necessary. This is intimately bound to the question of authority, both in terms of content and method: *Who* gets to decide what the learner needs? Why is this need considered to be representative of the learning object? Why is a particular learning task seen to be representative of and fulfilling the learning need? Why should this activity lead to (an ultimately ill-defined) knowledge? How can the object learned be

considered to mirror the object that is the goal of learning? Obviously, the answers to these questions are complicated when the learning 'object' itself is challenged as a construction, as a fiction even, and not an obvious and transparently available entity.

The object of a learning course, the 'need to know' (about) something is often mixed too easily with an assumed parallel to learning theory. However, 'Although a certain view of what knowledge is may *imply* a corresponding view of how it is acquired, we cannot assume that such correspondences are necessarily consistently applied in the formulation of learning methodologies' (Benson 1997: 24-25, emphasis added). The main point then, regarding the representation of language and culture, is that it is not a simple matter of formalizing the rules, categories and patterns of language and meaning-making, and then assume that by teaching them that knowledge of the system – thus formalized - will be obtained. Even if these rules/categories do exist in some autonomous manner, there is little guarantee that they will be so construed in the learning process, the goal of which is to develop performative (not formal) competence or a logic of practice that coheres with interactive needs and functions.

### ***6.1.3 Applied Linguistics, SLA Research and Foreign Language Teaching as (Positivist) Approaches to Language and Communication***

Linguistics and its sub-branches aspire to scientific respectability and validation, and has even been said to suffer from 'science envy' (Block 1996), or 'physics envy' (Lantolf 1996). Given this tendency, one might expect to find strategies of legitimization, noted above, similar to those of the 'hard' sciences. Indeed, both Block and Lantolf (cited above) have argued against calls within SLA research to select single theories with which to proceed and develop a more scientifically respectable discipline – ample evidence of the work of exclusion. It is also possible to see other strategies to attain scientific legitimacy, and the urge to describe as predictable – and thereby master – the linguistic object in a comment by Goffman (1972) who noted of sociolinguistics:

Every year new social determinants of speech behaviour are reported... Alongside this correlational drive to bring in ever new social attributes as determinants of speech behaviour, there has been another drive, just as active, to add to the range of properties discoverable in speech behaviour itself, these additions having varied relations to the now classic phonetic, phonemic, morphemic and syntactical structuring of language. It is thus that new semantic, expressive, paralinguistic and kinesic features of behaviour involving speech have been isolated, providing us with a new bagful of indicators to do something correlational with. (Goffman 1972: 61)

Some commentators have therefore begun to question the domination of positivism in linguistic research and pedagogy, and have begun to recognize the possible limitations of the pressure to be scientific: 'SLA could be intellectually hobbled by an increased insistence on 'accepted facts'... and scientific positivist modeling' (Thorne 2000: 223). Others have likewise questioned tendencies that favor practices which continue to legitimize the academy rather than cater to the learner's interests. Kramsch notes one problem in L2 pedagogy is 'the positivistic tendencies in education, that consider testability as a criterion of teachability' (1991: 223). Others point out that the urge to be scientific is dangerously 'reductive' (Pennycook 1990), or that the move toward supposedly unbiased methodology is blatantly questionable (Borrelli 1991). Even Chomsky is well-known and often cited for his reservations for the application of pure linguistics in language teaching<sup>3</sup>.

This does not mean that language education should proceed without a strong and principled foundation, or a criteria of selection, but that, as the Frankfurt School argues, it should not engage in research and practice that is blind to its own hegemonically constructed logic. Moreover, practitioners in the field should question exactly whose interests linguistics and language teaching truly serves. As notes Cook, 'Atomizing language by approaching it bottom-up has yielded results for linguistics, but it does not necessarily follow that the same is true for all language students' (1989: 85). Similarly, Low notes that applied linguistics researchers are 'obligated to

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<sup>3</sup> 'I am rather skeptical about the significance, for the teaching of languages, of such insights and understanding as have been attained in linguistics and psychology... it is difficult to believe that either linguistics or psychology has achieved a level of theoretical understanding that might enable it to support a 'technology' of language teaching' (Chomsky 1966: 37).



acknowledge [their] tendencies to particular ways of making sense of our work and to reconsider their fragmented instabilities' (1999: 297).

Writing in 1990 a general, as he puts it 'where-are-we-now? and where-are-we-going?' (Pennycook 1990: 9) article, Pennycook was an early voice in acknowledging and exploring the need in applied linguistics for a reappraisal along the themes of the politics of knowledge construction and action, ethical methodology and poststructural theory. Arguing for a 'principled postmodernism' he first of all summarizes the dominant modernist assumptions of the field: positivism, a notion of a rational individual, dualism bolstered by Saussurian distinctions in language, and an assumption in the universal applicability of Western truths. Pennycook's main thesis is that there is a need to 'reinstate the political and the ethical as the principal elements of our academic work' (Pennycook 1990: 22), so that – as new-born critical applied linguists – we 'understand that the knowledge we produce is always interested' (Pennycook 1990: 25). To do this, we need also to understand how the practices of applied linguistics and language pedagogy manage their relationship to theory.

## **6.2 Theory and Practice**

One can identify at least two main accounts regarding the relationship between theory and practice. In the cognitivist approach theory is envisioned as a 'feeder' source for practice, whereby, in a vertical and hierarchical relationship, theory informs how a practice is set forth (Bruffee 1986). Theory posits and defends the existence of material or cognitive phenomena that are significant and therefore worthy of analysis, and determines how they are set in relation to other phenomena (themselves previously posited). Theory also defines concepts and argues how they are to be operationalized, thereby creating for itself a 'field of understanding' (Anderson 1996: 161). Practice, taking its cue from theory's field of understanding, undertakes the

analysis of the phenomena within it, or 'puts into effect,' materially and physically, the kinds of action that theory prescribes.

On another, often more general or cynical reading, theory and practice are even more distinct: there are those who 'theorize,' and those who 'do'. Stereotypically, the former consider the latter as proceeding in ignorance of the foundational principles, effects and consequences of their actions, and the latter accuse the former of living in ivory towers, removed from the realities of the situations they theorize about. In this account, theory and practice are often thought to be irrelevant to each other, perhaps even opposed.

One could also discuss two areas relevant to FLT in which the theory-practice dichotomy features. In one, the dichotomy refers more to theory that informs research methodology, such as that regarding second language acquisition, while in another the issue is how theory is used to develop, is invoked in – or remains tacit in – teaching practice.

### **6.2.1    *Theory and Research***

Given the mainly positivist, scientific orientation of most branches of linguistics, one might expect the more dominant viewpoint to be that theory informs (as to being separate from) research practices. Whether researchers present and publish statistical data, survey reports, or analyses of classroom interactions, among a host of other types of research, these practices are implicitly generated and framed by theoretical perspectives. With theory, as noted, justifying the existence of phenomena and therefore implying, if not prescribing, how those phenomena are to be turned into analytical evidence, there would in effect be nothing to practice were it not for the initial work of theory.

However, there is more 'overlap' between 'reflection and action' (Bernard-Donals 1998) than there is a transparent flow between these supposedly distinct areas of understanding. Theory for example operates as practice in that it involves a 'material dialectic' (Althusser 1990), since the production of theoretical as well as scientific knowledge is constituted in the conditions of the material world and its constraints (Bernard-Donals 1998: 173): or, to put it more precisely, theory (and ideology) develops *in relation to representations* of the material world, rather than develops one-to-one representations *per se*.

Second, theory is social practice in which fields of understanding are established through exertion of authority, legitimization and social convention (in short, language games) that are ideological (Bernard-Donals 1998) and not the products of the supposedly impersonal and disinterested ruminations of the theoretician. Indeed, the whole vision of 'language' that linguistics has operationalized is an historicized and ideological product that emerged from the need to 'discipline' – both in the sense of controlling and of making it a scientific enterprise – language in the colonial era. Like anthropology's disciplining of the notion of culture, linguistic prescription and description served state expansion by standardizing language (Pennycook 1994). Pennycook reveals how the claim that linguistics made an objectivist turn, from prescription to description is a myth, a 'cherished belief' (Pennycook 1994: 114) held by linguists, and did not occur. The categorization of language forms into vulgar, coarse, educated, served to reinforce state moves to standardize and centralize 'education, language, printing, reading and, possibly, thought' (Pennycook 1994: 115).

At a more hands-on level, where the so-called descriptive work is undertaken, Green et al. illustrate how what linguistics determines and describes (or prescribes) as relevant knowledge is inevitably theoretically determined, enmeshed and interested:

The act of choosing talk is also influenced by researchers' assumptions about language, both *a priori* and *in situ*. What counts as language and what is perceived as a meaningful bit of language *in situ* depends on the researchers' cultural knowledge of that language systems and discourse practices....For example, hearing a sound as stress involves understanding how stress is signaled and understood within a particular language group. To see silence as meaningful, and not merely the absence of talk, or to see someone as taking the role of questioner involves cultural understanding of the discourse practices of a social group...writing down what one hears is the result of a range of interpretive acts. (Green, Franquiz and Dixon 1997:173)

'Significance' then, is a hermeneutic achievement. Consequently, the pedagogical problem of depicting 'real life' or 'real conversation' is an issue wrought with complexities that go beyond the usually simplified decision as to what to choose as an aspect of language to research, learn or teach, since it calls for an articulation as well as a justification of the theoretical principles supporting any given interpretation.

The comment by Green, Franquiz and Dixon also applies – perhaps more urgently – to the problem of cultural representation, since it raises not only the difficulty of choosing linguistic or referential meaning, but implies the theoretical and political act of representing the symbolic and performative practice of an arbitrarily defined collective of actors. When culture becomes a theoretical object, it demands and entails a need to adhere to *a priori* definitions and assumptions concerning culture that have been academically constructed, rather than presents a choice (even if difficult in its own right) of what is already purely and neutrally 'there'. Theory becomes a practice of legitimization

However the phenomenon of culture is defined, the possibility of the definition, of the very articulation of culture as a phenomenon of the world, is rooted in a particular vision of the world that articulates the potential, elaborates the values and legitimizes the role of intellectuals (Bauman 1992: 2-3).

The choice becomes embroiled in the reproduction of what Chambers (1996) calls the doctrine of 'cultural canonicity' which proposes that a particular aspect of culture X is more relevant, significant, authentic or valuable than another.

The always already fused nature between ideology and representation means therefore that there is no clear-cut distinction between theory and practice: 'No matter how differently embodied or deployed, one does not wholly leave the practical to detour through the theory (nor vice versa)' (Seigworth and Macgregor Wise 2000: 144). However, this inextricability takes us deeper into important issues concerning the effects of one on the other, as well as whether these effects are in fact recognized, especially when one claims to be concentrating on either of the two.

One important critique is that scientific discourses operate at a remove from their foundational premises. In other words, while theories and assumptions do unavoidably form the justifying foundations of research methodology, that is, determine both the epistemological and ontological frameworks governing the way research is carried out, 'the justifying theory is rarely fully articulated' (Anderson 1996: 164) in actual practices. Thus, 'in most of the research we read, paradigmatic fragments, implicitly assumed or less frequently explicitly referenced, are the most we get in ad hoc justifications' (Anderson 1996: 164) of the rationale and interpretative frameworks of the study. This is either because the implicit justifying theory has become so axiomatic in a given type of research protocol that the theoretical underpinnings are no longer considered necessary to be spelled out with each and every paper, or more problematically, because it is not recognized even that there is a theoretical, rather than transcendental, position the research depends on. Instead, members engage somewhat less than professionally in what Althusser (1990) calls 'spontaneous philosophy,' whereby they react promptly and negatively to challenges of their theoretical worldviews without being able precisely to pinpoint, in balanced theoretical terms, neither what it is they are reacting against, nor which theoretical principles they themselves hold. Any ostensible and touted changes or progresses that occur therefore do not actually upset these fundamental assumptions:

The *partial revolutions* which constantly occur in fields do not call into question the very foundations of the game, its fundamental axioms, the bedrock of ultimate beliefs on which the whole game is based (Bourdieu 1993a: 74 emphasis in original)

The closely related second issue regarding the theory-research relationship occurs at the other end of the research process, and illuminates the constructed nature of 'evidence'. Because the theoretical support structure of the object of analysis is forgotten, any research that focuses on that object has pre-set definitions of what the results of that research can indicate or identify: 'All normalized fields of inquiry, exact or hermeneutic, work to contain what events can mean and seek to justify that meaning-making work on their claims' (Anderson 1996: 163). In short, research finds what it looks for, because the 'discovery' (on top of the research question and method itself) has already been posited as a knowable object, and therefore, one endowed with significance by the research and the researchers. In the case of a linguist devising a research question therefore, she has a priori definitions and understandings of what the situation, the context, the classroom dynamic, the linguistic feature, the meaning, or the results, as examples, can mean. And as Atkinson notes, because scientific methods 'neutralize by design what is variable and individual (in human behavior or otherwise) [they] produce epiphenomenally uniform accounts' (2002: 536) of that which they aim to understand.

Thus, one of the biggest problems is that writers and researchers, when (they think they are) talking about communication reduce all communicative knowledge to language, especially language in terms of codes, rules, and material manifestations such as words. Whether sociolinguistic or pragmatic factors are taken into account or not, language *thus defined* is the basis of all human expression. Or rather, in this line of thought, everything is expressible through language-as-code, and all that remains is to decode it and its ontology. But neither this nor any other version of language is a system that can represent human cognitive, affective, psychological, social and symbolic experience of communication in its entirety. There are too many conscious, subconscious and interactive processes and variables that (linguistic) science cannot fathom, let alone master. The point therefore may not be to undertake a study of these ever increasing variables and processes in order to describe and somehow teach or learn them, but that the *unknown* of learning, meaning-making and comprehending be acknowledged, that we recognize that the socialized, acculturated, human way of

conceiving and perceiving the world is to an unknown degree indescribable, unquantifiable even 'unshareable,' and ultimately therefore unrepresentable.

### **6.2.2 Theory and Teaching**

The relationship between theory and teaching is often more antagonistically viewed, with the work of theorists (and researchers) considered by teachers as having little relevance to the classroom, experience of which the former have supposedly little experience. However, teaching is social and cultural practice governed and constrained by various epistemological discourses and ideological and practical pressures. This means that teaching too proceeds with values and assumptions – in short, theory – and is therefore always already a theoretically driven accomplishment.

Like, and perhaps even more than, the theory-research dynamic, teaching is practiced as though the theories underlying it were tacitly known and accepted – both by teachers and learners. It often proceeds therefore with a comfortable sense of expertise when in fact the theoretical bases of what is done is left unexamined, ignored or naïvely unacknowledged. Without a firm and consistent attention to theory, however 'language learning is reduced to a technical activity divorced not only from politics but also from social relationships of any kind' (Benson 1997: 27).

This is clearly evident in foreign language pedagogy, where there are in effect no longer questions about what it is that we teach and learn. As Barson notes, the crucial question of "what shall we do?" in a term, course, or class, is 'often short-circuited by the a priori assumption that what one does in a foreign language classroom is study and learn the language' (Barson 1997: 5). Therefore, though it is perfectly possible and reasonable to ask 'Why do we assume that when we go into a class we are teaching the English (French, Japanese etc.) language?' one is likely to receive the brusque reply: 'Well, what should we teach, Spanish?'<sup>4</sup> In other words, few question

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this is a genuine quote of a colleague.

the ontological validity of the pedagogical object they are assigned to present, nor the relation between what they teach, and what is being learned.

*Theoretical Assumptions of Teaching*

It is possible and indeed not difficult to reveal the tacit and implied axiomatic propositions and assumptions upon which we depend to teach foreign languages. What follows is a summary of *some* of these basic beliefs of teaching, most of which have already been discussed or mentioned in passing before. It aims to reveal that the theories supporting much of pedagogy are not as irreducible and foundational as the practices they engender suggest. In other words, while the practices of teaching reveal these assumptions – something that will be demonstrated in the next chapter with reference to more specific kinds of (CLT) activities – they are not unchallengeable and rather, reflect the overall, ‘official’ empirical and epistemological materialism and positivism which language pedagogy and SLA research reflect, whether it is realized or not.

Therefore, the epistemological and ontological theories underpinnings of many of these propositions is provided, and many are further accompanied by brief comments. Many of them are reflected in others and may seem repetitive (such as 1, 2 and 3; 4 and 5): however, an attempt has been made to separate propositions into component parts, so as to commensurately reveal how convoluted the are.

1. *Language is a closed, definable, predictable, internally coherent, logical system, and is used to transmit information.*

Meaning Realism. Instrumentalism.

When the focus is on language as a material phenomenon – as it overwhelmingly is – the assumption is that language can carry all the communicative requirements learners will have. Language is treated as a functional code of transmission that is nonproblematically acquired and used.



*2. Words make clear and direct references to things.*

Foundationalism. Nominalism. Correspondence Theory. Meaning Realism

This is revealed in the insistence, not only on vocabulary acquisition, whereby no associative, social, hegemonic or affective meanings are demanded or explored, but also in the assumed literality of translation in exercises where learners substitute L2 words for L1 words. While we may be left quite lost if we did not make this assumption – we have to deal with words at some stage and at some level, a) it is nevertheless an assumption that can be questioned, and b) it has an affect on teaching practice, methodology and content choice, which otherwise may be differently approached.

*3. Language use and knowledge is quantifiable.*

Materialism. Material Cognitivism. Positivism.

This assumption is also foundational to foreign language teaching. That it is made and unquestioned is shown in the ease with which curricula are designed to present elements of language to be progressively built up in the learner's mind, and which we then can examine, with an attendant numerical value representing success.

*4. We have to go into a classroom and teach something.*

Determinism. Objectivism.

We make the assumption that what we do causes the learner to learn the object of our defining. (It also is very beneficial to the (E)FL textbook industry.) But the notion of 'teaching' can in fact be altered – and indeed constructivism has made some effort toward this reconceptualization – as can the object of learning, the 'something,' we chose to teach.

5. *We have to teach English (German, Japanese etc.) the language.*

Justificationism. Reductionism. Foundationalism

What do we mean by language? By English? What assumptions have been mobilized so that we define and separate it so easily? And again, what do we understand by the notion of teaching?

6. *What we teach makes sense to students, in the same way as it makes sense to teachers.*

Empirical realism. Epistemological correspondence.

Already discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to constructivist critiques of education. While this assumption might be softened by prefixing it with 'If they understand us properly' this is nonetheless for various reasons, untrue. What does 'make sense' mean? For what purpose and context is sense made? The effect of the legitimization of certain ways of constructing the language learning problem is that, a) a student's problem may well be answered in a manner that makes sense for the teacher:

the teacher's request for correction might function less as a facilitator of greater comprehension than as a means of reducing the act of comprehension to the system of relations which the teacher (not the learner) understands (Lian 1999)

b) if students ask a question of grammar, it is not because grammar 'exists' as the one and only means to describe language, but because grammarians have instituted it as a true representative of language, which has powers to explicate linguistic functions. According to theories discussed here however, making sense is a personal and *historically specific* achievement, assisted, but not determined, by explanation, and of course nominally guided and constrained by the culturally available choices of interpretation (culture here referring not only to 'large' culture, but also by the culture of particular fields and practices, such as the culture of pedagogy).

How is the assumption that the 'sense' is mirrored by learners made? Because assumption 7 allows us to think that:

7. *What we teach represents what Ss have to learn.*

Material realism. Assumptions of (epistemological) correspondence.

Representation is based on decisions as to what is representative. That is, representation of 'language' is based on a reduction of what language can or must be to those who want to represent it, *so* that we can represent it. This reduction depends on a perspective, not a transparent reality of what there 'is' to represent.

8. *The way we teach fulfills learning needs and triggers learning processes.*

Transmission, Determinism.

The truth is, we (experts, researchers, philosophers etc.) have no idea what 'triggers' learning. We have only been able to observe (again what we observe is based on what you want to look for, that is, a perspective) a posteriori the conditions in which *that which we deem* 'good' learning, seems to have taken place. Learning may well take place *despite* teaching as much as *because* of teaching.

9. *Testing learners is an indication of their acquisition and sense making.*

Epistemological Correspondence. Determinism.

Testing usually occurs at specified times, following courses of instruction. Do they therefore actually test the learner's knowledge and ability, which according to learning theories discussed in Chapter 5, develops at various rates, follows individual patterns, and is the result of individualized associations (i.e. is rhizomatic)? Or do tests simply evaluate the ability of the learner to 'memorize' *the content that was covered* in the allotted time frame?

10. *We know what we are doing, we are experts.*

Perhaps not a theoretical assumption *per se*, but clearly evident in the confidence with which we go about the business of teaching. While we would all like to think that this is true, this is, as much as anything, an assumption that arises out of the political claim of authority and legitimacy that our membership in a community of teachers or researchers allows.

### **6.3 Legitimacy in FL Educational Practice**

Using what might loosely be called postmodern arguments it has been shown that science in general is an epistemological orientation that has established its legitimacy and acceptance as a means to discover, produce and distribute knowledge, using strategies of validation of its own devising that ensure its continued validation of what *it* calls knowledge. The same can be said of education, which in many ways is closely allied to science, since as a point of dispersal of legitimized truth, as a dispenser of the canons of accepted fields of knowledge (scientific among them) and of the sanctioned images of a given culture and social group, is also involved in the business (and for various reasons the metaphor is apt) of ultimately reproducing its own importance, thereby securing its standing and demand.

While the ideals and objectives of education are numerous and changing, so that in some interpretations the purpose of education is to 'liberate,' or to provide access to any chosen field or profession, the current economically driven work of education is to ensure that a population can continue to function doing the things that are considered appropriate and acceptable in practice as well as in thought. The Marxist flavor of this reading of course stresses that this is hierarchically arranged to cover all classes of society, and that not everyone is earmarked for liberation or power:

Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual [in a democratic society] can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-

trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it. (Foucault 1972: 227)

Education is therefore an instrument of selection. It chooses – and has chosen for it by other cultural systems, such as religion or economic interests – the truths, ideologies, discourses etc., that are currently validated, and chooses to whom it grants its privileges – to students (many of whom go on to become educators). Indeed, Borrelli (1991) goes so far as to say education that does not take a critical stand toward society and other cultural systems is only practicing an ideology of domination and power, and cannot claim to any ideologically free objectivity.

The following section briefly considers some of the legitimizing moves and discourses that serve to construct education and educational practices, looking particularly to the field of foreign language teaching. In this way it can be shown that the choices FLT makes with regard to methodology, forging research interests and applying research discoveries, and adopting theoretical orientations, to name a few disciplinary moves, are by no means made on the basis of pure fact and progressive epistemology.

### **6.3.1    *Administrative Practice and Educational Ideology***

It does not take long to identify two more or less conflicting discourses (depending on driving ideologies at any one time), operating in institutional education. On the one hand, there is the aforementioned educational ideology of liberation, or the emancipatory ideal, which not only implies the provision of means for learners to access any chosen field, but also the (critically engaged) strategies by which that access is made possible (e.g. by enabling the adoption of individually preferred learning approaches). On the other hand, institutions are charged with, and have contributed to the development of the ideology of efficiency, quantification, control and the general management of its 'resources' (from materials, to teachers and students) and *modus operandi*.

Of this clash Byram notes:

The notion that there should be different kinds of learning experience for different groups of pupils is incompatible with a definition of education for all which is dependent on the belief that it should be the same education for all. (Byram 1991: 4)

Of course, the notion of the 'same' education for all clearly reflects a view that the teaching object and *learned* object are necessarily the same, and are deterministically related. (Moreover, this can be interpreted as a comment which confuses the democratic ideology of giving the opportunity of all *access* to education, and the idea that this access must be uniformly made available. There is no reason to believe that *opportunity* for all amounts to or equals the *same* education for all.) Nevertheless, enforcing practices that homogenize the learning experience, as well as the learner, is clearly the easier and more efficient option for the institution, since it ensures a more manageable and cost effective operation: if everything and everybody at least appears to be the same, then of course complicated and costly variables are reduced.

At any rate, cost-effective, management-oriented education necessitates a linear, fixed-goal and an impersonal curriculum. One way the institution creates this is by discursively constituting the roles of teachers as authorities - in the dual sense of experts and leaders, and of constituting learners as the subjects of their wisdom and disciplinary power (Luke 1992), since authority and power are integral components, not by-products for achieving efficiency:

A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency (Foucault 1979, cited in Luke 1992: 111)

Indeed, perhaps teachers are the ones first to feel the conflicting interests of pedagogical authority and learning autonomy, caught as they are between their administrative duties and their educational ideals – if these have not been dampened.

McGroarty (1995), who suggests that language teachers have to act as 'double agents,' discusses the following topics as areas with which teachers have to deal: teachers as agents of culture and curriculum; language as medium of instruction and language as object and; teachers as agents for learners and learning. As representatives of various faculties and fields theirs is thus a job of attempting to balance various pressures so as to attempt to satisfy all demands. Still, the burden weighs inexorably and unavoidably on the side of authority and administration:

Whether he knows it or not, whether he wants it or not, and more especially when he thinks he is being radical, the teacher remains the holder of a mandate, a delegated authority, who cannot redefine his task without entering into contradictions or putting his receivers into contradictions, so long as there is no change in the laws of the market in relation to which he negatively or positively defines the relatively autonomous rules or the little market he sets up in his classroom (Bourdieu 1993a: 67).

The 'efficiency demand' also operates at the fundamental level of defining the learning object, which means, as one example, that in the foreign language learning class the separation of skills (listening, speaking, writing, reading) is done 'more for logistical than for logical reasons' (Kumaravadivelu 1994: 39) and, as a remnant of the audiolingual era, has 'very little empirical or theoretical justification' (Kumaravadivelu 1994: 39). Likewise, the teaching of structure satisfies the administrative need for control and clarity – it is much easier, of course, to teach and test the conveniently objectified and systematized language than anything that might reveal language or communication to be more complex or challenging than this.

The need to consider administrative requirements is also witnessed in the inability of foreign language pedagogues to introduce genuinely experimental and radical ideas to the institution, since the dominating structural and cognitive view of language, knowledge of which can more easily be tested, hinders any change. Most teachers will recognize the process whereby the call to teach communicatively (which is made as much as to enable the institution to state this in its promotional brochures) is contradicted at the final turn, when, in preparation for exams, class-time is reduced to

cramming all the necessary structures that will constitute the exam. Jacobs and Farrell summarize:

Perhaps the best-known and most painful example of the failure to implement holistic change in second language education is that in many cases while teaching methodology has become more communicative, testing remains with the traditional paradigm, consisting of discrete items, lower-order thinking and a focus on form rather than meaning. This creates a backwash effect that tends to pull teaching back toward the traditional paradigm, even when teachers and others are striving to go toward the new paradigm' (Jacobs and Farrell 2001: 13)

It is thus not without reason that writers and teachers quite often argue that methods and content must be devised in consideration of the so-called 'realities of the classroom,' or the 'unalterable facts of classroom life' (Allwright 1984: 166), since they are all too aware of (and perhaps have themselves internalized the logic of) the administrative constraints imposed upon their work. Then there are the more 'mundane' practical and material obstacles such as budget allocation, which prohibits experimentation and change as much as dictates the purchase of teaching and learning materials, classroom furniture and architecture, and so on. Thus holistic change, 'realistically' speaking depends not *only* on reconceiving ontological and epistemological definitions of language, but of altering the institutional hierarchy in which administrative needs outweigh educational ones.

### **6.3.2 *Acting on Behalf of Students (and Teachers)***

Pedagogical authority is intimately linked to educational authority. With powers invested in them through their institutionally bestowed expertise, researchers and pedagogues can legitimately make claims as to the knowledge requirements of learners, based upon which (supported by the objective empiricist assumption of observational validity and literalness) they can then go on to assess on behalf of administrative requirements. Ranney, in line with the majority view of SLA researchers and pedagogues (since it validates their work), writes that 'one of the tasks of second language researchers is to discover what a learner needs to know.'



(Ranney 1992: 25) What Ranney and many others like him do not realize is that, whatever it is that learners do need to know will be discovered by those experts who, with their a priori categories at the ready, will define the knowledge needed in *their* terms, using scientific conventions to make the observations and needs analysis, and once thus defined, will readdress learners with this modified 'knowledge' need, assuming that it will make sense to learners as it does to them, since to them it is the true representation of the 'need'. In other words, to 'discover' what learners' needs are, is an interpretative act. However, particular interpretations are based on theoretical perspectives that provide the instructions for that very interpretation (Anderson 1996). And once interpreted, the act of presenting learners with this version of their need requires *re*interpretation by the learner. There is no guarantee that the learner's problem is so directly observable however. As a simple example, if we note that learners have problems with adding *s* for English plural nouns, there is no reason to decree that this is a grammatical problem, rectifiable by a double dose of tasks involving plural constructions. Other more complex reasons may lie behind the difficulty in producing the correct utterance. It is important therefore to find ways to help learners tackle problems from various perspectives.

The conviction that field-appointed experts in powerfully legitimized disciplines can predetermine all learners' needs, especially now that we can say that these needs are social, and involve an analysis of cultural logics, rather than solely linguistic logics, is as misguided as it is well-meaning. Nonetheless, teaching practices continue with a logic of their own:

because language and learning are described and analysed from the teacher's/academics perspective, which assumes a "unified" and "homogenized" world, we as educators recognize and name "only legitimate moves" and ignore or miss those behaviours that do not fit our analytical framework' (Zamel 1997: 344).

This can be said at various levels of instruction and learning, and is implied in discourses ranging from curriculum design, methodology, and moment-to-moment intercourse between teachers and learners.

Even debates as to the politics of language teaching are conducted at a remove from learners, since their interests are in many ways hijacked by discussions which, while important, do not in the end consult learners themselves. This is particularly notable with regard to culture when researchers like to ask and debate whether learners should adopt C2 behaviors, assumptions, or values. Shouldn't the *learner* answer this?

### **6.3.3    *The Cycle of Method***

Many pedagogues realize that methods and approaches current at any one time have often been forwarded or even used in the past, and that their current popularity is but a revalidation of certain perspectives which are periodically recycled. A neat summary of the historical circularity of methods and approaches is given by Decoo:

A new idea usually starts slowly, not as an extreme, but as a corrective emphasis. However, some fundamentalists may jump on the key word, overemphasize its importance, publishers will smell the money and, given the right circumstances, the movement is launched...

After years of such emphasis there follows the growing disappointment, the criticism, and slowly the pendulum is set in reverse towards variety and eclecticism. Traditional components are restored and methods return to revered values, which, after a number of years, will be sensed as antiquated and the cycle starts again. (Decoo 2001: n/p)

This is clearly the result of the 'partial revolutions' of which Bourdieu writes, since the lack of critique of the fundamental assumptions of FLT inevitably constrains the choices of action to well-known and traditional theoretical paradigms and pedagogical approaches; the competence versus accuracy, or the grammar versus communication dichotomies for example, are principal pivots in the swing of the FLT pendulum.

A similar problem is that methods purporting to represent a given approach are ultimately quite ambiguously executed. Decoo, again, writes of the life-span of foreign language teaching methods, in which the 'said' and the 'done' of an approach

display significant disparity, and what is more, continue to incorporate what they claim to reject:

A present-day method may claim to reject translation, but students will translate, and the teacher will use translation when helpful and effective. The method may be against explicit grammar, but somehow it will make sure that students grasp the rule and train it. It may claim to only use authentic material, but it will present the simplest authentic material first and cleverly manipulate texts and situations so as to ensure a needed progression. It may claim to be against word-lists, but will select within the authentic material the words to be learned as "active vocabulary" and present them in... word-lists, with translation (Decoo 2001: n/p)

With the administrative eye looking over their shoulder<sup>5</sup>, ignoring these inconsistencies and preferring instead to see that language knowledge, or 'understanding' remains quantifiable, little thought is given to the inherent inefficiency of this to-ing and fro-ing, and there is little hope that, without serious re-evaluation of foundational axioms of foreign language pedagogy, any major changes will be made. Instead, methods and approaches will be fought for and over, theoretical assumptions will be implied or glossed rather than

justified, and expertise will continue to be validated (and sought after to gain entry in this very game), with students kept either in the background, or used as anonymous subjects in experimental research that aims to match proposition and hypothesis with observation.

#### **6.3.4 *Protecting Learners and Guiding Learners***

It is ironic that researchers acknowledge the normal process of shock that learners go through when learning another culture and then aim to protect learners from it. This guardian role is promoted for the sake of the learner, and what the learner, this time, perceives to be the reality of the classroom: Ryffel for example aims to 'provide a safe environment by more closely conforming to what new students expect as

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<sup>5</sup> Although two conflicting parties and ideologies have been identified in this section, there is also a third, and that is the publisher's interest. Nothing of course is published if the publisher does not think it will be profitable.

appropriate classroom behaviour' (Ryffel 1997: 28). Perhaps the desire to reduce the anxiety of *new* students in this way does seem empathetic and unchallengeable, and of course anxiety in learning should also be reduced (as also discussed in Chapter 5).

In Chapter 5 however, it was also argued that a phase of shock is a useful and even necessary learning phase, and that humans learn by being confronted, particularly if they then have the means to objectively analyze the source of shock. Thus, in many ways the aim to establish a 'safe' environment is counterproductive when it seeks to eliminate the opportunity for learners to meet contrasting performative expectations, challenging conditions, behavioral dynamics and misunderstandings in their analysis of foreign cultures: the learner loses the chance to fathom what the source of the communicative problem is. Moreover, while embarrassment and (classroom) stage-fright should be minimized, mistakes and communicative hurdles should be encountered by the learner so that feedback, reflection and the identification of problems *by the learner* is not denied.

Likewise the ability to 'confront, compare and contrast' (Lian 2000) one's knowledge and perception is not an approach that should be promoted so that cultural differences can ultimately be smoothed over and ignored, but rather so that they can be kept in the foreground. One of the learning aims in FLT is to ensure that learners can work with an awareness of difference, so that neither cultural party's standing is usurped, since: 'The kinds of beings we want to become are open, permeable ones, suspicious of metanarratives; pluralizers' (Rabinow 1986: 257), and to avoid authorial control, which 'seems to blunt self-reflection and the dialogic impulse. The danger: the obliteration of meaningful difference (Rabinow 1986: 257).

Ryffel's intention to meet students' expectations of classroom behavior can be seen as another call for teachers and researchers to take into account the realities of the classroom, since the reality is that learners will come to class expecting activities consistent with the traditional notion of learning a foreign language. Fortunately however, students' expectations do not refer to a transcendental, naturally manifest

classroom, but to the classrooms practices and expectations of which they have had experience since an early age. We need here only recall therefore that learners themselves have been positioned to be the kinds of learners they are and what kinds of experiences they can expect: learners only expect what they have been taught to expect, and this includes both how the object of study and the behaviors 'appropriate' to the classroom have been defined. Thus, there is every possibility that with time, many learners will be willing to change their expectations of foreign language learning and what it entails – as much as we expected them to change with the introduction of CLT!

### **6.3.5    *The Construction of Meaning(?) and The Construction of Learners***

If we refer back to Bakhtin's and Vygotsky's notions of the dialogism or the co-construction of knowledge and meaning, one needs to consider, given classroom realities, if it is actually possible to assert that current teaching and classroom practices are *co*-constructive. Wells for example discusses the concept of 'triadic dialogue'. In it, the 'stimulus-response-evaluation' (SRE) process, whereby teacher-learner interaction is characterized by initial request, learner response and teacher evaluation, is changed so that learners are given the opportunity to 'provide explanation, justifications, and amplifications, or even to offer their own point of view' (Wells 1999: 145). Thus the interaction can 'develop into a genuine dialogic co-construction of meaning' (Wells 1999: 145).

This is an emphasis in keeping with many arguments in which co-construction is promoted as an ideal learning condition. Yet Wells' and others' idea of co-construction leaves itself open to critique and can be seen as being only superficially dialogic. For one, it can arouse the suspicious mind in terms of the nature of the interaction. That it is an 'interaction' *per se* does not make it any less one in which the instructor governs the conditions in which it takes place. That is, learners must obviously still conform to the strategies, constraints and evaluations the teacher

determines: how can one encourage opinion sharing, without at the same time making it an obligation? That is, how is the elicited explanation or justification not still a response to the teacher's demand? Further, the notion of 'meaning construction' is often left as ambiguous as that of meaning itself. What and whose meanings are being constructed?

It has been shown that an important condition and catalyst of learning is problem solving. In the field of language teaching however, it is possible to identify that there are actually two sets of problems that are involved, though one is much more heavily addressed than the other. On the one hand there are 'real life' problems, tasks, needs and so on that are experienced and solved by 'just plain folks' (JPFs) (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989) in the course of their daily lives. In carrying out the communicative, functional, interpersonal and personal performances in various contexts and discourses, people – mobilizing their habitus are guided by the internalized histories of performative rituals, constraints and logics of their social and cultural milieu. That is, they do what they know and can do in getting from one moment and day to the next.

On the other hand, foreign language pedagogy makes a 'problem' of language learning, thus reinforcing the ostensible need to protect learners and position them as learners, before they are even acknowledged as speakers. This learning problem is not one of application, therefore, but one of acquisition<sup>6</sup> (the two are notions being typically separated), and the focus remains on the content of the objectified system of relations seen to be contained by the target language itself. In this way these problems - defined and designed by linguists, instructors and planners, in a sense fold onto themselves; they become self-referential problems, which, when solved, represent the completion of a 'language learning task,' no more and no less. Language as part of a

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<sup>6</sup> This of course evokes the competence-performance dichotomy, whereby learners are thought first to build up their stock of L2 knowledge and *then* go out and use it..

communicative system - content *with* expression, content *as* performance - continues to be inert.

This applies equally to CLT as it does to other approaches, since the tasks set in CLT classes likewise often resemble problems that reproduce a) the problem of 'learning language' even if 'realistic' and 'conversational' language is presented, and, as a consequence reinforce b) the legitimacy of (constructing) 'the problem' *per se* as a pedagogical tool and object, which c) is set by those who are ordained to produce the problem on the behalf of learners.

Consequently, the majority of tasks are more involved in the subjectification of the person as a learner of a language, rather than the construction of that person as an intercultural speaker. In other words, texts, tasks, activities etc. place the learner in positions of 'learned helplessness,' dependency on teacher governance, and ineptitude, not as active, genuine co-constructors of socially relevant meanings and performances. The language class, even the interactive one, continues to be constructed as a site for the practice of chosen bits of language, and ultimately, chosen opinions, justifications and behaviors mimicking learner agency. Language learners should not be reduced to this role, for they too are JPFs. When the aim is to develop performative competence in a cultural setting, then real-life problems are those that the learner must learn to solve as much as the native.

#### **6.4 Summary: Ethical Pedagogy**

The main theme of this chapter has been that scientific knowledge is as much a political product as it is the result of research and investigation. Indeed, the very practices of research and investigation are underpinned by assumptions that are theoretical and (therefore) ideological, and ultimately historically specific according to the winning argument of the day. The neutrality and objectivity that science and truth-producing discourses claim are an integral part of the language games and

rhetoric which are utilized in order to claim (sole) legitimacy *as* truth producing disciplines. In postmodern rhetoric this is considered to be the violence and terror of logocentric scientific knowledge production.

In linguistic disciplines, which aim to be scientific, this has resulted in a view of language that is a paradigmatic construction. It has necessitated the 'disciplining' of language, an insistence that language be viewed in the terms and categories that the field (discipline) has established in order to manage (discipline) language as an object, as a self-contained system which can be investigated in those terms. In turn, in FLT research there is often the implicit claim that it operates as objectively as the other hard sciences. But just like the hard sciences, the questions that are asked, how they are framed, the problems that are identified, how they are produced and 'solved', do not escape institutional politics and legitimating practices by the 'priests' – ordained by a school of thought, consecrated with a vocabulary to ensure a level of the esoteric.

Educational practice too furthers the work of ideology by making references not only to scientific knowledge, but also by adhering to the centralizing and standardizing operations of the state. Its structure and organizational logic are the results of these movements, which are themselves maintained by self-legitimizing discourses. While some educational ideologies aim toward 'emancipatory' knowledge, the administrative and economic imperatives of educational institutions hold the balance of power over content, delivery, and evaluation.

Of course, it would be difficult to support claims that foreign language teaching and second language acquisition research are unethical, whether consciously or implicitly, and the points raised above have not been made to further such a claim. This chapter has attempted to illustrate however, that the *practices, purposes and goals* of teaching are as concerned with legitimizing the way it identifies problems and then 'solves'



them, as they are with helping the learner. FLT, like (applied) linguistics (and also because of its association with it), is not independent of the political processes that underscore and somewhat undermine all disciplinary claims to knowledge and truth finding, nor is it free of foundational assumptions which are often unstated and unrecognized.

For example, pedagogy proceeds with the notion that if a grammatical point is taught it can be tested, that if a vocabulary list is presented the learner can later be expected to display her retention. But this is a potentially shortsighted and perhaps ultimately obstructive assumption. It allows no room for the learner who acquires a word when studying a structural feature, or a grammatical point when reading a text for 'meaning': learners must learn according to the learning prescription presented to them.

#### ***6.4.1 Reflexivity and Critique: the Need for Critical Resolve***

One can neither research nor teach without a theoretical position informing the way the knowledge object is conceived and defined, how the relationship to it is to be operationalized, what this relation aims to achieve and how, and how its results are to be determined, interpreted, and measured. This is not a problem in its own right: theories and categorizations underlie all human activity and we would be in a position of extreme ignorance if we wanted to proceed without them, since our approach must necessarily be always already theoretical, written, inscribed, contextualized and set in relation to wider fields.

The inability to transcend one's theoretical worldviews is of course one of Derrida's main points, as seen in chapter 4, and applies equally (if not more so, given Derrida's interest in the metaphysical premises of knowledge) to the scientific field. Indeed, even the ability to critique or deconstruct scientific discourse is part of its very construction:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. (Derrida 1976: 24)

So what can be done in response to the critique of positivism and educational legitimacy as outlined in this chapter? How must our practices change to (re)introduce the ethical dimension our work necessarily requires?

First, an ethical approach to teaching requires that those entrusted with the task of representation reflect on the kinds of epistemological and ontological assumptions they make when teaching, designing tasks and curricula and testing. In this way they can justify the kinds of choices they make with regard to the learning object – language/culture – and also maintain an awareness of the constraints of their own positions. Thus, Calhoun writes of the need to acknowledge the time-bound nature of our knowledge:

The need for historical specificity...is the need to recognize (1) the limited vantage points provided by the historical perspective of each and every theorist, and (2) the immanence of theoretical categories in the world of practice. (Calhoun 1996: 86)

More than simply being aware however, it is important commensurately ‘to attempt to explore the limits of the theoretical box in which one is imprisoned’ (Bourdieu 1993b: 184), as this keeps the critique of FLT active, when it would otherwise stagnate.

This does not implore a need to constantly change for change’s sake, as this would constitute a mere thoughtless challenge to innovate without theoretical basis, but it does demand an ability to reconceptualize our activities and to develop what Giroux calls ‘the capacity of a metatheory’ of theory, which entails that we:

must acknowledge the value-laden interests [theory] represents and be able to reflect critically on both the historical development or genesis of such interests and

the limitations they may present within certain historical and social contexts. (Giroux 1983: 15)

As with social science's analysis of social life, one consequence for the study of language, communication, cultural practices, and the study of second language acquisition is that:

One should first attempt to understand just what the practice is, not categorize it immediately on the basis of its surface similarity to practices with which one is familiar. (Calhoun, 1996: 80)

This applies at two levels. First, it means critiquing one's understanding of the object or practice itself, and second it means critiquing one's representation of it: it was to this end after all, that this thesis introduced (in chapter 4) concepts of meaning and culture that challenged the current understanding of them in language teaching, and discussed the problems inherent in representation and correspondence in chapter 5 as well as in this chapter.

Another, much less common, argument is that pedagogues must also be able to articulate their assumptions and theories to learners, and for two reasons. First, it would allow learners themselves to engage in a critique of the logic of pedagogical practice. In this way they can genuinely challenge and negotiate pedagogical practice. Second, it would mean that the task of representation is shared, compared and contrasted, so as to

provide the means for knowing what one is doing and for freeing oneself from the naïveté associated with a lack of consciousness of one's bounds (Bourdieu 1993b: 184)

The idea therefore, that students should somehow suspend their ideological make-up, so as to develop cross-cultural empathy is misguided, since one cannot transcend one's habitus. However, what is theoretically conceivable is that learners possess the

means to critique their approach as well as understanding of the study of culture.

In sum, language teaching must raise the level of abstraction from which it normally proceeds. It should not assume that language or communication, or culture is a known or a given and that the central problem is one of choosing appropriate (i.e. 'sample,' stereotypical and also testable) content, but keep these notions and constructs constantly in play. This means that FLT practitioners must maintain what one might call a 'critical resolve,' that is, a determination to foreground theory and assumption in everyday pedagogical practice.

#### **6.4.2 Principles of the Ethics of the Discipline, Methodology and Teaching Practice**

The major principles that have emerged out of this chapter are:

1. The construction of knowledge in academic and scientific disciplines is as politically motivated as it is motivated by the 'need to know'.
2. Thus, the object of foreign language and culture learning is not to establish the 'truth,' or a 'true representation,' (one might say that some representations are true for people some of the time, but no representations are true for all people all of the time) but the ability to *co-create* representations as they are contextualized in interaction.
3. As such, language teaching must be more transparent in its choice of approach and methodology, and open to greater negotiation with regard to them.
4. Institutions, teaching and goals must be set and adjusted to learners' needs, rather than expecting learners to adjust to the needs of the institution and its organization. If an objection to a recognized need, or proposed curriculum, syllabus, activity, approach, method and so on is made on the basis that "it is not practical for the classroom context," then we must find a way to change the classroom context, not necessarily the suggested need, syllabus etc. Of course, in day to day practices one does have to take into consideration the constrictions of

what materials and tools are available as well as the curricular objectives that one has to conform to, but this doesn't mean this situation can't change from the top down, as well as the bottom up.

5. There is no necessary or obvious connection between the scientifically derived results of second language acquisition, or for that matter learning, and the methods which are supposed to create the conditions to emulate them.

#### **6.4.3    *Defending the Principles and Arguments Outlined in this Thesis***

This chapter has been crucial to the development of a principled framework to FLT. It has in fact changed the direction of the way in which such a framework *can* be developed, because it has placed the learner firmly – and genuinely – in the center of its scope. As much as this thesis has argued for an ethical approach that acknowledges and publicizes its principles and assumptions however, so too must this thesis be able to defend itself as an ethical production. This is because one anticipated criticism is that the reader may come to think that there is a substantial contradiction in the argument of this thesis. That is, how can an argument that makes a point about the fundamental inability to determine truthful representations of language and culture make a claim, as in chapter 4, as to how to conceptualize and approach cultural analysis?

This contradiction may be resolved however, when it is noted that the model of culture has not been offered as 'what is best' in terms of content, but that it is offered as an analytical framework that acknowledges culture as the process and production (not product) of language and communication, that it is the simultaneously symbolic, material, concrete, abstract, political and even mysterious 'machine' that underlies much if not most of human interaction. Culture in this light is not 'content' for language learning, but rescues language from its structural and code-like perspective to its properly social one. This is distinct from positing culture as an (other new) object of study in opposition to what is unavoidably seen as the 'transparent' production of structure or function.

Now that the main principles of this thesis have been laid out, it is possible to apply them, firstly, in a critique of some of the kinds of tasks, methods and activities that are advanced and practiced, especially in the name of communicative language teaching, so as to illustrate their inherent weaknesses in representing communication. The following chapter is devoted to this task.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Critique of Classroom and Instructional Activities from the Perspectives Outlined**

This chapter returns to communicative language teaching by providing a more concrete critique of some examples of tasks and activities that are attributed to CLT. Thus, although a critique of CLT in general was provided in chapter 2, giving rise to the motivation behind this thesis, this chapter focuses on specific types of activities. There are two main aims for this. First, it is to reinforce the contention that despite its ideology and its insistence on communication and practice, CLT remains a) mired in a linguistic paradigm, that b) it does not take into account theories of meaning nor of learning and c) is therefore not as learner-centered as the claims that are made in its name. Second and most importantly, it is to apply the principles and concepts devised so far in examining the weaknesses of current pedagogical thinking and practices.

While it is therefore quite possible to argue that many ideas, including learner autonomy, a focus on culture, context, communication and pragmatics, and changing teacher roles have all been forwarded and claimed as CLT foundations, this chapter aims to diminish the strength and veracity of these claims.

## **7.1 Critique of Methods and Activities in Communicative Language Teaching**

The following critique and analysis focuses on activities which are (implicitly) claimed to represent communicative and cultural practice and in turn are attributed with the power to develop so-called communicative competence. The sources here are textbooks or texts which aim to provide examples of given activities, and while it may be argued that teachers often adapt and choose activities from texts to their own teaching styles and conditions (according to their own implicit or explicit assumptions of learning and teaching), and that therefore textbooks do not really represent what takes place in the classroom, the fact is that such textbooks are what teachers have to work with, tend to use and must refer to as typically prescribed by syllabuses.

### **7.1.1 Notional-Functional Activities**

Language functions are a central interest in CLT, and the teaching of them has been a staple feature of the communicative language class since its inception (Dörnyei and Thurrell 1994). Characterized by aiming to raise awareness of typical illocutionary acts in given situations, language functions such as greeting, suggesting, asking questions, giving opinions, agreeing or politely disagreeing, and reacting appropriately are thought to provide ready-made meaning-making strategies and conversational skills. The range of activities includes:

such tasks as learners comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences; working out a likely sequence of events in a set of pictures; discovering missing features in a map or picture; one learner communicating behind a screen to another learner and giving instructions on how to draw a picture or shape, or how to complete a map; following directions; and solving problems from shared clues (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 76).

These activities are thought to encourage and enable the 'real use' of language.

And therein lies a primary drawback: the devising of activities in which learners 'use' the language to pass 'messages' to one another in order to practice language functions does not equate to communication. Learners are not involved in the process of



actually saying something worthwhile, they merely pronounce what is required by the given exercise. While one stated aim of CLT is to get learners to 'express' themselves and to 'own' the language, the tendency of the above activities to impose and demand particular expressions and phrases is counterproductive precisely in these terms.

Functional phrases, moreover, are "grammaticized". The piecemeal fashion in which they are presented, extracted from situations, taken out of history, and not arising out of needs, does not indicate the place and logic of functions in a general communicative scheme. That is, the logic of situations is assumed to be a) universal and transparent: *everybody* (in the world) 'greet' and therefore it is just a matter of applying different phrases and words, and b) rule-bound. The presentation in this format implies that a) there are situations, and b) these situations require or commonly featured phrases like this. But this demands an insistence on a linear and causal conception of meaning-making: either the speaker must *a priori* recognize the situation *and then* use the right phrases, or (even less likely) decide which phrases to use and then make a situation out of it. This is contrary to the notion that contexts, meanings, relationships and strategies are co-constructive of any transaction. Thus, even though common situations do exhibit repeatable patterns, they are still defined *each time* by speakers. (For this reason many language learners become frustrated when, after having rehearsed in their mind a particular and apparently simple exchange they are suddenly flummoxed by the other speaker's response). Because CLT tends to present situations as obvious and directly transferable across cultures, they remain phrases devoid of meaning or socio-cultural import: it is 'just what you say'. Thus, 'The notional syllabus deals with the components of discourse, but may not deal with discourse itself.' (Brown 1987: 215)

*True Colors: An EFL Course for Real Communication* by Maurer and Schoenberg (1998) is one textbook that aims to functionalize and contextualize English learning. In each Unit (chapter) a new structural feature is presented in a text box. This is followed with a cartoon or cartoon strip which illustrates and highlights 'Grammar in a Context'. The cartoon characters' speech bubbles are only partly completed, as

learners are expected to fill the gaps with the appropriate structural feature they have just learned.

An example is the introduction and presentation of the negative question:

Negative Questions
Use negative <b>yes-no</b> questions to ask about something you already think is true. <b>Aren't</b> you Dick Morgan's brother-in-law? (The speaker thinks you are.) Use negative <b>yes-no</b> questions to express an opinion you are sure others agree with. <b>Isn't</b> this weather awful?
<b>GRAMMAR TASK:</b> Find other negative <b>yes-no</b> questions in the photo story on pages 74-75

(Maurer and Schoenberg 1998: 77)

A series of exemplifying cartoons is underneath in which students are asked to complete the dialogues correctly. Following this, the 'negative question with why' is presented:

Why in Negative Questions
You can use <b>why</b> in negative questions to suggest future actions. <b>A: Why don't</b> we go to that concert together? <b>B:</b> Good idea.
<b>GRAMMAR TASK:</b> Change A's suggestion and B's response. Use your own words.

(Maurer and Schoenberg 1998: 77)

This example, which appears in Unit 6 of the book, after students are expected to have completed about 45 hours of classroom contact, illustrates a number of problems. One of the first questions for example is why the concept of negative question is deemed important at this stage of the learner's acquisition. Of course, the easy reply is to fall back on the major pedagogical assumption that *something* has to be chosen, so why not? But the absence of any introductory discussion as to the whole notion of negative questions, and the absence of any rationale and grounds of the choice *here* gives rise to a sense of isolation of functions from one another: the basis upon which they are presented remains part of the mysterious and esoteric processes of the authors' minds. What does 'something you already think is true' mean? What social contexts require a negative question? Who can you ask a negative question to and when? Instead of having an activity in which the need for a negative question emerges and presents itself, the activity is entirely imposed as representative of an *a priori* linguistic requisite. It is another function to add to one's growing repertoire. Indeed, perhaps the most irritating aspect of the activities in *True Colors* is the simplicity implied in understanding the rationale of the communicative act. After one page and a small number of brief activities the authors note with a self-congratulatory (and patronizing) tick that the language learning check-list is one step closer to completion:

√ Now you know how to suggest future actions. (Maurer and Schoenberg 1998: 78)

With regard to context, it is interesting that the activities and tasks in *surrounding* pages are equally random. The unit begins with adjectives for weather, which is framed in the context of small talk. Two pages of the negative question ensue, and then the learner is directed to discussing family trees. Though there is an attempt to connect the function – negative questions are used, as in 'isn't the weather awful?' (which is, the learner is told, best answered by an unbelievable 'unbelievable'), the 'contexts' as well as the content are thoroughly disjointed. Again, this is a self-inflicted process – something has to be put together. In this case, as in the majority of instances, the learning themes centre on linguistic function, with the contexts taking a

secondary place. Indeed, despite the emphasis on 'communication in the real world', the learning task is distinctly *grammar* in a context. Grammar is thus presented as an autonomous communicative entity that contains and carries all meaning. The learning priorities are clear, then, despite the presentation of 'situations'.

Significantly then, the problem with the contextualization of the grammar has the opposite effect than intended. Indeed, this is the ultimate downfall of CLT in general. Where pictures and illustrations with interactions are featured with the intention of placing the needed structural feature in a functional setting, these are in the end no more than a tactic to dress up the real purpose of the activity – to learn the grammatical point in question. Subsequent activities consolidate this emphasis when learners are asked to do pair practice, for example, and are told to 'practice all the adjectives' (Maurer and Schoenberg 1998: T76 [teacher's notes])

In terms of dialogue and interaction then, people just say things for no apparent *reason*. English speakers just have *functions* to perform in their daily lives. No background or preliminary details are given regarding the speakers, the level of formality, nor of the assumptions regarding the speech or relational patterns, or the general practical logic behind the context. What strikes one is how little discussion as to the *social* functions there is – there is neither discussion as to the importance of small talk for example, nor why the weather is a small talk topic in English speaking countries. There are no explanations regarding the functions beyond those found in the text boxes. No alternative possibilities are given or acknowledged (e.g. 'should we go to that concert together?' 'Are we going to that concert together?' – these are treated in separate chapters without reference to each other) that lets learners know that other question-forms are not suddenly redundant or inappropriate.

In sum, when notions and functions take precedence in language learning activities, learners are presented with idealized and predetermined linguistic practices. In an effort to 'contextualize' such functions, illustrative cartoon characters or actors in photos are depicted, but do nothing actually to point out any interactive feature that a

visual example might be useful for. When 'themes' are chosen, they defer to the elicitation of structure, not to the lives of people. Indeed, people in textbooks should be commended for being able to hold entire 'conversations' with a smile.

### **7.1.2 Tasks**

Although Task-Based Language Teaching is sometimes considered an approach in its own right and not merely a component of CLT, the principles of both are in essence the same (Richards and Rodgers 2001). Indeed, there are few (if any) complete task-based learning programs (Richards and Rodgers 2001) and so tasks tend to be incorporated into general CLT-based syllabuses. While in itself a broad concept that 'defies clear terminological, conceptual and methodological understanding largely because of the indiscriminate, nondescript use of the term' (Kumaravadivelu 1993: 69), the task in general aims to create opportunities in which language learners are meaningfully engaged in communicative transactions or applications of language. Examples include cloze tests, reading and determining the main idea of a passage, or looking up 'the classified ads for a job [learners] might be interested in' (Wenden 1991: 42). One might also note that the examples of functional activities described by Richards and Rodgers above are also considered tasks.

Where tasks differ mainly is that they focus on learning strategies and are therefore underlined by learning theory rather than theory of language (Wenden 1991). They are thought to be beneficial because they are motivational, incorporate both input and output processing, and because they can be adapted in terms of difficulty (Richards and Rodgers 2001). Moreover, with task-based activities

teachers and learners have a remarkable degree of flexibility, for they are presented with a set of general learning objectives and problem solving tasks, and not a list of specific items. The essence of a task-based methodology lies in the negotiated interactional opportunity given to learners to navigate their own paths and routes to learning, using their own learning styles and learning strategies. Learning outcome then is the result of a fairly unpredictable interaction between the learner, the task and the task situation. (Kumaravadivelu 1993:73)

While the principles implied in this passage seem to be quite sound, a look at some examples reveals discrepancies between the promise and its fulfillment.

In *New Interchange 2*, promoted as one of the world's best selling and 'most successful' English course textbooks for adult and young adult learners at intermediate levels, Richards, Hull and Proctor (1997) present a number of various task-based activities. As with *True Colors*, each chapter, or unit, contains the same kinds of activities and tasks, generally divided into the four skills. Each unit begins with a thematic focus – the 'Snapshot' – in which students have to discuss a particular topic. This is followed by a 'Conversation' (accompanied by a cassette tape) in which characters have a short sample dialogue using the kinds of phrases learners are going to learn in the unit. Then a 'Grammar Focus' section presents the unit's main learning goal (or one of two) – the acquisition of a structural feature of English. The rest of the chapter aims to provide contextualization activities in speaking, reading, writing and listening, where learners apply the learned grammar.

In Unit 5 for example the theme is 'travel' and the two grammatical features are future ('be going to' and 'will') and modals of necessity and suggestion. The opening Snapshot section lists a number of various types of vacation, and what people like to do on them

### **SNAPSHOT**

#### **what people like to do on vacation**

<b>Discover something new</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> take language, cooking, or sailing lessons</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> join an archeological dig</li></ul>	<b>Enjoy nature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> go camping, hiking, or fishing</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> relax at the beach</li></ul>
<b>Take an exciting trip</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> visit a foreign country</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> travel through their own country by car or train</li></ul>	<b>Stay home</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> catch up on reading</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> fix up or redecorate the house</li></ul>

(adapted from Richards Hull and Proctor 1997: 28)

Learners are then enjoined to:

**Complete these tasks**

Which of these activities above do you like to do on vacation? Check (✓) the activities. Make a list of other activities you like to do on vacation. Then compare with a partner.

(Richards Hull and Proctor 1997: 28)

What is the purpose of these tasks? Is it to stimulate learners' interest? Is it to orient them to the focus of the chapter? Or, are they intended to get learners to express their genuine interest in traveling and vacations? In what sense can these really be considered tasks? While the instructions are quite straightforward, what does the completion of the task represent?

Richard, Hull and Proctor note of the Snapshots that they

graphically present interesting real-world information that introduces the topic of the unit or cycle, and also develop vocabulary. Follow-up questions encourage discussions of the Snapshot material and personalize the topic (Richards Hull and Proctor 1997: iv)

What is evident here however is that there is no meaning or even interesting information inherent to the exercise. What kind of 'real-world' information is this? It is indeed only vocabulary that is learnable, since there is nothing else to focus on. That this activity personalizes the content moreover, seems a dubious overstatement. One might imagine the stimulating and 'personalized' discussion arising from partners comparing their likes:

**Student A:** Uhm, I like to go to the beach.

**Student B:** Me too.

In interactive terms, what in this activity guides the learner to behave and communicate and perform in the target language in an appropriate manner? There is nothing about the socio-cultural realities of the other that orients the learner to

systems of logic or meaning-making. There may well be an aim to 'personalize' the topic, but it is precisely the imposed significance and centralization of The Topic – which itself is as usual used a springboard to learning about The Language – which depersonalizes it. The common CLT practice of asking '*What do think about...? Give your answer in full sentences*' is portrayed as a communicative prompt, but it conversely acts as a conversational dead-end. Again, the completion of the task is presented as a reward in itself. Whether the learner can get anything out of it which might be socially useful is another matter altogether. Indeed, a potentially fruitful discussion regarding how tourists from various countries (stereotypically) behave and why is sadly missing: the focus of the chapter is after all the 'future tense' – not an analysis of the Other.

In sum, tasks such as this, which ask learners to fill in some kind of information gap about themselves or others, and 'compare with your partner' is – from a communicative standpoint – of little value and mundane, not to mention somewhat demeaning to force mature learners to talk about what they like to do (on vacation).

The writing task following the Grammar Focus asks learners to write about a fictitiously planned trip. An example is provided:

Next summer, I'm going to travel to Indonesia with my family. We're going to visit Borobodur in Central Java. It's one of the biggest temples in the world. And we'll probably visit several other temples nearby....

Richards, Hull and Proctor 1997: 30

Here one can note a number of curiosities. First of all, the task is in clear deference to the grammar that is required, rather than any communicative purpose. The 'going to' and 'will' are what count as learning goals here, the 'logic' of which has just been explained as simply as

*'Use going to + verb to talk about plans you've decided on. Use will + verb with*



maybe, probably, I guess, or I think *to talk about possible plans before you've made a decision.*

(Richards, Hull and Proctor 1997: 30)

Second, the question that arises in terms of communication is: Who is the audience of this mini essay? Is it written to anyone other than the learner? Will any feedback be given, and in what terms? That is, it seems there is no communicative purpose – no dialogue or ‘negotiated interactional opportunity’ in this exercise. Rather, ‘language output’ and practice is the final arbiter of its success. In socio-cultural terms, thirdly, the writer of this example is clearly relatively wealthy or middle class, educated, young; a person for whom traveling internationally for vacation is an assumed and taken for granted practice. Is this mentioned? How relevant is it to English learners the world over, both as information and as a contextualization of the use of the future tense?

These tasks show an epistemological ideology that is questionable in terms of its purpose. Even if tasks may in themselves be inherently interesting, even ‘contextual’, what is missing is any analytical component. As with many types of activity, it is taken for granted that a task’s underlying logic need not be examined or cross-culturally compared. The ‘interaction’ between learner and task makes the assumption that there is a transparency in the task’s meaning and purpose, and that the task replicates in some way the learner’s language needs.

In terms of cross-cultural issues, social protocols, practices and politics are as usual absent from the performance of the task, and this can only result in its reduction to ‘language’, not communication. Even when learners set the task themselves<sup>1</sup> there is little consideration as to whether the strategy fits the need, because the need itself may be linguistically defined: learners may decide that they need more vocabulary

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<sup>1</sup> ‘When teachers set them, they are referred to as ‘tasks’, but when learners determine them for themselves they are referred to as strategies’ (Wenden 1991: 42)

and set themselves memory tasks, yet this potentially reduces the notion or vocabulary itself to a set of discrete and basic units of another code.

With tasks that are set by teachers or textbooks, there is also the contradiction in suggesting that learners are given flexibility to choose their own 'styles' and 'paths' when clearly they are given the objectives and purposes inherent in these tasks. Yet what is the distinction between a set of task-based problems and a list of specific items, when the logic operating behind a task continues to be content – reconceived as information – which learners must cover? If tasks are set around the activity of learning the grammatical feature of '*going to*', where is the learner's definition of the task or need, let alone his or her flexibility? In other words, on what grounds are these objectives presented, according to which principles, and by whom?

The distribution of tasks into levels of difficulty is also problematic: how is 'difficulty' determined? Is it the complexity of the 'problem' or the complexity of the 'language' that is considered? And how in turn is complexity understood and defined? Why is '*I am going to go...*' or '*You really should...*' considered as intermediate English?

Another significant feature is that much of task-based methodology has learners interacting with tasks and texts, rather than other people. Of course, a significant amount of communication (and study) does involve person-text dynamics, but the frequent absence of actor-actor interaction obviously undermines the interpersonal and dialogical aspects of learning as well as communication.

When tasks do insist on face-to-face interaction, as the Snapshot for *New Interchange* does, Frawley and Lantolf suggest that there are some discrepancies between stated and real:

techniques like the BSM and picture narrations may very well elicit linguistic samples that in no way reflect the learner's attempts to communicate some message to an addressee... [However] structured tasks may well tease out language that is

representative of a speaker's attempts at self-regulation and as such may bear little resemblance to the kind of language that would be produced in a true dyadic exchange of messages. (Frawley and Lantolf 1985: 41)

Thus the learner's focus again is on the linguistically defined text: the words, the phrases that the learner has to get right at the expense, ultimately, of the message itself. Foley (1991) for example, writes approvingly of Prahbu's task-based method which focuses on the learners' 'use and development of their own cognitive abilities through the solution of logical, mathematical, and scientific problems [where] the target language was the means through which they [work] in order to do such things' (Foley 1991: 71). While this of course again sounds like the 'do something *with* the language, don't just study it' principle, there is no explanation as to why mathematics could in turn help the (or every) language learner. What is missing is a justification as to the purpose of the tasks as being beneficial for developing performative competence. There is no questioning as to the relevancy or intrinsic interest for many learners in solving mathematical problems, as long as learners display the appropriate strategies ('logical', one assumes) that task-makers expect. Cultural, pragmatic communication is again absent. The aim, even when the syllabus is negotiated 'in a spiral of decision-making' (Foley 1991: 72) between teachers and learners is always to successfully carry out a task, to give the appearance of negotiating meaning, which in fact turns out to mean working out a problem someone has decided fulfils universal learning needs and uses.

Also, while tasks may be 'meaning-focused' whereby activities are created so that language is used to do something more than focus on itself, these activities are still devoid of socially meaningful characteristics. The learner is either repeating or constructing sentences, not producing expressive utterances in the fuller sense of the term. Thus, many if not most tasks serve no other purpose than to create an illusion of language use and, by implication, acquisition: in other words, tasks are ultimately inward looking, self-referential and lead to no epistemic gain of anything but the elements of language that the task is designed to elicit.

Sticking to a task totally limits the free play of possible directions and strategies an interaction may exhibit, since the characteristics of communication a task aims to represent are preordained by task-setters. A task set in this manner presumes that the meanings, the meaning-making strategies, the turn-taking patterns, the power relations and a multitude of 'hidden dimensions' of communication have been determined and understood by learners according to *a priori* interpretations of what the interaction is supposed to achieve. In short, tasks may give learners 'something to talk about', but the topic need apparently bear no relation to social interaction or performance, need not be explained in terms of the principles and assumptions underlying them or justify the purpose beyond that of practicing language.

### **7.1.3    *Role Play, Pair Practice, Simulation***

Role plays, pair practice, simulations and to a lesser extend drama have all been heavily used by CLT activity designers as integral aspects of the emphasis on communication. Indeed, most role play and conversation activities could be considered as notional-functional tasks that more specifically focus on speaking skills. Underlying these activities are the assumptions that speaking encourages learning, that speaking is expressing oneself, and that speaking in pairs or groups is representative of communication.

#### *Role Play*

One teacher makes a personal observation regarding the use of role play in the class:

Role play can certainly be a useful technique – though personally my heart sinks a little when I see yet another instruction along the lines: 'One of you is the shopkeeper/hotel manager/doctor's receptionist; the other is the customer/guest/patient. Act out the conversation' (Thompson 1996: 12)

Thompson's reaction is justified. While in principle the notion of social roles has been recognized in such injunctions, it is not so as to develop a greater awareness of how those roles are constructed, how the communicative performances and strategies used in them are derived and created from cultural constructs and expectations, how

they manage and guide interpretations, what images and even stereotypes they evoke, or how they are reinforced and maintained. Moreover, how relevant are these roles to the needs and realities of learners? What purpose does it have to 'play the shopkeeper' if the learner will never be, say, a French shop owner? Usually it is no more than to learn the vocabulary of groceries, or the grammar of requests. Such method is an attempt to 'squeeze' the student into what has been considered important, as though practicing scripts such as 'buying shoes' or 'doing a job interview' the language becomes meaningful simply because it is orally produced. Yet the level of learner interest and involvement, where the learner actually assumes and accepts the premises and stakes of the situation (and suspends his or her disbelief) is a considerable issue here. Indeed, role-play is often the type of activity that 'does not result in any major self-investment by the individual speakers, especially as the simulation is self-contained and is often imposed by the teacher in an attempt to cover the set syllabus' (Lian and Mestre 1985: 189)

With the removal of language from wider contexts, and the learner from the stakes of their production, role plays reveal a view of communication where meaning is autonomous from practice, where it is transparent, objective and requires no hermeneutic effort and requires only rehearsal until the words are memorized. Role-playing, then, is very often not a 'communicative', but a mnemonic device, with the only things at stake perhaps being the attempt to avoid embarrassment in front of peers.

#### *Pair Work and Conversation*

In *Conversation Gambits: Real English Conversation Practices*, Keller and Warner (1988) provide situations (under the themes of 'opening', 'linking' and 'responding' gambits) and a list of phrases which they might commonly require (thus revealing an adherence to notional-functional perspectives). For example, under the heading of linking gambits Keller and Warner present situations of arguments and counter-arguments:

<p><b>40. Arguments and Counter-Arguments</b></p> <p>Very often, when we have a plan, someone has an objection or a reservation. We have to think up a counter-argument to try to persuade them.</p> <p>In this dialogue the husband is trying to persuade his wife that they need a cottage in the country.</p> <p><b>Him:</b> Why don't we buy a cottage in the country - somewhere we could go at weekends and for holidays (<b>Plan</b>)</p> <p><b>Her:</b> That's a good idea, but don't you think the children will get bored - can't you hear them - not the cottage AGAIN this summer! (<b>Reservation</b>)</p> <p><b>Him:</b> That's probably true, but I think it would be nice for us, and after all, it won't be long before they'll want to go off with their own friends (<b>Counter-argument</b>)</p> <p>Work in pairs with these ideas using the phrases for reservations and counter-arguments.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A: take up skiing B: don't have the time or money A: it would be fun, good exercise</li> <li>2. A: buy a flat B: can't afford it A: cheaper than paying rent</li> <li>3. A: fly to Moscow B: cheaper to go by train A: we'd lose a week of holiday travelling plus all the money on food</li> <li>4. A: buy a new car - the old one's rusty B: we haven't finished paying for the old one A: the old one's dangerous</li> <li>5. A: have a party B: the neighbours would object A: why not invite the neighbours</li> <li>6. A: your plan B: your reservation A: your counter-argument</li> </ol>	<p><b>Reservation</b></p> <p>Yes, but...</p> <p>Yes, but don't forget...</p> <p>That would be great except...</p> <p>That's a good idea but...</p> <p><b>C o u n t e r - arguments</b></p> <p>Even so,</p> <p>Even if that is so,</p> <p>That may be so, but...</p> <p>That's probably true, but...</p> <p>Possibly, but...</p>
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(Keller and Warner 1988: 51)

Gambits such as these are commonly used, and aim to contextualize the functional language point targeted. In questioning the relevancy of these situations to language learners, however a less flattering picture emerges. What is implied, firstly, is that learners will understand the gambits or situations, when in fact a considerable interpretive effort – one that is aware (for example) of various relationships of power in the target culture – is required. Indeed, the situations do need interpretation regarding the socio-cultural features of the exchange. Do British husbands and wives really talk in such neat and formalized ways? Who can afford to buy ‘cottages in the country’? What backgrounds might they have? What class of people can ‘take up skiing’, who buys new flats or cars? With whom would people have these discussions? What are the political dimensions of these expressions and interactions? There are myriad unasked and unanswered questions, but all that is required of the learner is that s/he transforms the gambit into a recognizable conversational structure (e.g. ‘Why don’t we take up skiing?’)

What is striking about gambits then, at an epistemological level, is the implied transparency of the practical logic of situations, the absence of any analysis regarding the social contexts as well as the implied transferability in social meaning. In gambits ‘arguments’ or ‘counter-arguments’ are just formulas, ‘opinions’ are just opinions, ‘complaints’ are just a way to state problems, and expressions of like and dislike are universally similar with only the vocabulary changing.

Assuming the act of comprehension and linguistic transformation has been achieved, secondly, the activity demands that the learner can in some way identify with the situation or problem and thereby formulate opinions regarding it. If not, the required level of suspension of disbelief undermines any ‘communicative’ intent behind this activity.

Providing the general functional expressions but not the entire ‘meaning’ of a conversation is intended to create circumstances in which learners produce their ‘own’ utterances, and where the conversation can take its presumably natural course.

This raises the question of just how natural a conversation can be when one is forced to have it. Lian and Mestre (1985) point out a number of the major weaknesses activities aiming to get learners to 'have a conversation':

1. it is unlikely to be a serious exercise since it continues to focus on correct form rather than communicative purpose.
2. the motivating theme – often supposedly controversial – is more likely to be hackneyed and met with an apathetic response by students, e.g. "Oh gosh! Not another discussion on drugs".
3. the fact that normal conversations do not begin with a leader enjoining people "OK let's talk".
4. the fact that 'the subject of the conversation often...matters less than the relationships between the participants' (Lian and Mestre 1985: 188).

Looking back at Unit 5 of *New Interchange 2* then, where other conversational prompts include: *the kinds of things you can do at the beach, whether you have thought about your next vacation and telling the class about your plans, discussing the five most important things you need to take on various types of holidays, discussing whether you would like to backpack around Europe, and comparing dream vacations*, one might question how successful such conversations would be, both in stimulating interest, and in eliciting classroom discussions.

Finally, the 'conversations' these gambits stimulate are 'dead ends' in that once the requisite linguistic functions have been completed there is nowhere left to go: the trick in the gambit is to complete it using the suggested phrases. The communicative, personal, historical, 'meaning' (as an utterance, not just a sentence) ultimately becomes conversationally redundant. (And it certainly seems that gambits require much more effort in inventing and devising than performing.)



And these weaknesses point to an inherent paradox of CLT: in order to get learners to communicate and converse, they are being enjoined to do something that is conversationally unnatural.

### *Simulation*

In a simulation 'learners are asked to imagine themselves in a situation which could occur outside the classroom...to adopt a specific role in this situation [and] to behave as if this situation really existed' (Littlewood 1981: 49). In simulations the pedagogical focus is ostensibly less on language and more on the situations – the 'operating models of reality or some aspect thereof' (Ruben and Lederman 1990: 208) – and learners are more independent both from instructor and instructions.

There are many positive aspects of simulations. Even in an initial assessment one can appreciate that they provide more that is *analyzable* in an interaction. One could examine, learn and perform much more than just the words and syntax and this should be exploited. And, depending on how they are organized, simulations can also be spontaneous and creative in that they elicit rather than pre-empt learner's needs since, faced with communicative problems, learners are faced with the need to solve them. Simulations are more historical and are more concerned with process. Ruben and Lederman rightly argue that a good simulation must set things in motion 'and things must occur as a result of that initiation. The resultant actions need to have some observable process that can be used as manifestation of the initial states and relationships between those initial states, and the eventual outcomes' (Ruben and Lederman 1990: 210). In other words, the simulation is designed for learners to *generate* their own language by continuing conversations and interactions, rather than simply practicing a phrase in a one-minute role play so common to CLT classrooms.

Unfortunately however, the majority of simulations do not really show concern for or interest in more socio-cultural aspects of communication. Too often their purpose, as in role plays, is to provide a means to use vocabulary and functional expressions and

phrases, rather than examine cultural differences and similarities, social relations, constraints, or interpersonal strategies.

Crookall and Oxford (1990) present quite an elaborate example of a simulation called *The Island Game*. Designed as an ice-breaker, it is a game:

which involves problem solving and decision making under pressure, negotiation and bargaining about detailed issues, and preferences based on complex information. (Crookall and Oxford 1990: 253)

Learners (up to 35) are asked to imagine themselves as members of a group of hitherto unacquainted castaways on an island. It is known that the island is about to be destroyed due to a volcanic explosion in thirty minutes. With enough life boats to carry everyone to neighboring islands, and provided with increasingly detailed information about the geomorphology, climate, flora, fauna and inhabitants of these islands, learners have to group themselves so as to make their escape. Apart from preferences over which island they are to go to the castaways must also make a profile of themselves to assess the compatibility of those who are escape to the same island together.

Here we have a common feature of simulations: the 'models of reality' they are supposedly operationalizing are in fact far fetched and fictional, with desert islands or space ships often being the setting. While this simulation does sound quite entertaining, it seems also an opportunity missed. But this could be righted: if simulations expect learners to pretend a situation existed, would it not be possible to create situations that *did* exist? Would it not be possible to construct simulations – such as making a newspaper, complete with writers, editors, illustrators and so on – in which learners consider and analyze how, why and what sort of information, styles, layouts etc. various kinds of newspapers produce in the target culture?

Simulations are also generally presented as autonomous and independent exercises, only longer than role plays, as opposed to parts of larger processes. That is,

simulations often have a one-off character, intended to provide the opportunity to practice a chosen function, with no follow-up analysis of its place in the larger sociocultural system, or for that matter, in the lesson.

#### **7.1.4 Drama**

Jensen and Hermer seem to have a broader understanding of communication when they argue that their approach to language teaching 'seeks to promote a full sensory, physical and emotional appreciation' (Jensen and Hermer 1998: 179). As shown in chapter 3, they argue against the 'disembodied language' (1998: 178) of 'just words', and feel that their sensory approach through drama and enactment – of '[reinforcing] words through the senses' (1998: 185) provides a cultural element as well as a linguistic one. Here is one example of embodied language:

Verb	Pupil's Words	Pupil's Action
'to walk'	'I walk up and down'	pupil moves around the room
'to look for'	'I'm looking for something to eat'	pupil looks around
'to climb'	'I climb on a chair/table'	pupil climbs
'to get' to refuse etc.	'I get an apple' 'I can't refuse it'	

(Jensen and Hermer 1998: 185)

The first thing one may notice is the resemblance of this activity to the Total Physical Response approach (reference to which is absent), only in this case the student is following his or her own orders. But clearly any aspect of communication, let alone culture, is difficult to discern and is certainly not elucidated.

Moreover, their argument that this procedure raises cultural awareness, and that learners need to physically enact language falters when that enactment turns out to be

of nothing other than 'just words' taken from authentic texts, such as in one activity where learners choose verbs from an authentic text (a German novel by Salli Sallmann) and then create a story based on them (with a prop), to be enacted by self-commentating students.

It seems that students 'embody' their own meanings and describe them in the target language, without any effort made to elucidate difference. None of the activities Jensen and Hermer (1998: 185) outline set the stage for any interpersonal action – nothing is at stake, nor are any 'reality models' challenged. Indeed, the authors specifically assert, 'The most important thing is that [learners] play' which ultimately seems to be the motive which undermines many genuine opportunities for cultural awareness-raising.

Jensen and Hermer, who incidentally define 'awareness' as:

the ability to perceive one's surroundings with all the senses, to arrange what is perceived into one's own construction of a sensorial context and thereby continually revise one's own assumptions and models of reality – and correct them when necessary (Jensen and Hermer 1998: 187).

do go on to attempt a more cultural awareness raising exercise when students are asked to:

Sit down next to someone at a table... and perform the activity in different ways:  
the way you do at home;  
in a way in which you would never do it;  
as you would in a select company;  
as you do it in a completely different culture, etc

The same alienation technique lends itself to being enacted in the case of ordering a meal, handling the cutlery... each everyday situation lends itself to being regarded as foreign, in order to discover the differences between one's own culture and the culture of a foreign country. Whether for example to an English person a German holds his fork the 'wrong way round', whether one counts change into someone's hand or onto the table, whether I use my hands a lot or not when talking – the acting and learning possibilities are infinite (Jensen and Hermer 1998: 187-8)

This kind of activity seems a fertile ground for intercultural communication. On the surface, it appears to be an attempt to explore the notion of interpersonal space and social context. Notably however, these 'cultural' aspects are all physical and material and superficial, when 'embodiment' specifically aims to encapsulate the sense of the logic and ideal that is 'written' on the agent's body. They might be fun activities to introduce learners to cultural differences, but where is the consolidating work that more thoroughly explores these differences?

Even in the most recent discussions of the application of drama and playwriting such as in Elgar (2002), the use of drama activities is specifically addressed in terms of its linguistic benefits. These activities 'foster and enhance literacy skills' and give 'rise to much intensive language practice' (Elgar 2002: 22). And while students are the scriptwriters, which allows them to 'cultivate their imaginations' much of the effort is directed towards 'correction of grammatical and lexical errors' that 'can take place naturally as part of this general process of revision' (Elgar 2002: 24). That scriptwriting provides conditions that allow creativity, give scope for more detailed linguistic feedback and foster linguistic practice is undeniable – though how 'contextual' it is, as Elgar claims, is a matter of debate. In view of the wider potential for drama and playwriting to provide sources of cross-cultural reflection and literally *embodied* practice, ranging from contextually appropriate utterances (including idioms, clichés, metaphors and figurative language in general), to kinesic distance and body language, to social relations and the appropriate discourses, mannerisms, politics and cultural norms that structure them, the use of playwriting to provide linguistic feedback and practice can be seen as an unfortunate reduction of communication.

Another drawback of drama (as with simulations) is that it will not suit many learners, who will feel awkward being expected to act. Thus, although one of the most promising features of drama is that it provides a wonderful opportunity to examine the interrelation between meaning and expression (by considering

intonation, facial expression, posture and gesture and so on), and social relations as created in realistic dialogue, it may simply be too discomfiting for many students.

#### **7.1.5 Authentic Texts**

The lack of authenticity, of conversation in CLT classrooms has already been discussed. In terms of the written word, one feature of many language learning textbooks is that they contain (often to close chapters) a 'Reading' – an anecdotal or informative text that students usually read for comprehension. These are presented as 'authentic' texts. Of course, the notion of what constitutes authentic language and authentic text has long been a topic of interest in SLA and FLT (e.g. Widdowson 1984; 1998), and a frequent argument is that 'Authenticity of language in the classroom is bound to be, to some extent, an illusion' (Widdowson 1990: 44). One problem with the concept is that while terms such as 'language in use', 'authentic text', and 'context' attempt to direct activities to realities beyond the class, there is no such thing as 'language not in use', 'inauthentic text', or 'non-context'. It is always simply a matter of where language is used and there is never a point when there is *no* meaning (which is different from meaninglessness). Foreign language pedagogy implicitly knows, without knowing how to resolve the problem, that the context of 'learning a language' determines a set of conditions that may override and thus limit the possibility for what are considered 'authentic' contexts that give rise to purposive, and socially and politically charged meanings. In other words, it could be argued that if the classroom maintains the traditional dynamics which have been established, then overwhelmingly those dynamics – characterized by relatively fixed power structures, fixed meanings, apparently knowable outcomes and homogenized goals – will entail that the *context* of learning a language will never be language learning.

While authentic texts may serve to introduce vocabulary and usages that might not ordinarily be introduced in textbooks, thereby making vocabulary contact more random for the learner (that is, learners can identify words they do not know on an

individual, need-to-know basis, rather than being predetermined as 'needworthy'), limiting them to this purpose is to short-change their potential for cultural and social insight and critique. Why must text always remain as a jumble of words to be decoded? Luke points out the limitations in the use of text in this manner:

In those conventional programs that stress so-called lower-order reading skills, or even those programs that stress so-called higher order comprehension skills, the meaning of the text typically goes uncontested and unchallenged. Quite simply, where reading is conceived of as basic skills - whether decoding, word recognition, recall, or even 'meaning-making' - pragmatic questions about the strategic place and use of the text in a context of situation tend to be subordinated, and critical questions about the veracity, validity, and political authority of the text tend to be silenced (Luke 1995b: 103)

In general, the emphasis on the *achievement* of function of language continues to place undue weight on a linear, paradigmatic, codified object. Communicative competence continues to be measured as the ability to manipulate expressions and phrases, thus overriding the importance of communication as process and history, and, as with the majority of communicative language learning activities, displaces the social with the linguistic as determinative criteria of competence. Further, the assumptions of the transparency of the need and use of phrases in 'situations' undermines the hermeneutic effort required by learners, and, without assistance or the opportunity to analyze the language or the 'situations' from perspectives other than the linguistic, learners are depersonalized and remain 'out of the loop' when it comes to their own learning.

## **7.2 Summary and Discussion**

This chapter has briefly examined various types of classroom activities that are commonly employed in communicative language teaching. Based on the principles that have been developed throughout this thesis, such activities have been found to have inherent flaws and limitations both in that they do not represent what they purport to represent, namely communicative language, and in the sense that they do not encourage what they are promoted to encourage, namely communicative competence. Uncertain epistemology, combined with affective factors and common

classroom dynamics ensure that communication – as it has been viewed in this thesis, is unlikely to happen in the CLT classroom. Though it would of course be unreasonable and indeed impossible to suggest that every foreign language learning activity should meet the criteria and principles that have been set out in this thesis, or even that there could be a direct correspondence between the intended and actual effect of *any* designed activity, it is also not fair to the learner (or the teacher) to present activities as doing something they are not.

Communicative competence, as seen in practices promoted under the CLT banner, is considered to be an ability to produce a functional message in a context. Although this might suggest that speaking or writing activities done ‘in context’ highlight the functionality of language, it is in the end an act of deception to present such activities as communicative. That is, what learners are producing are *stocks* of ‘communicative language’ in controlled, superficial environments, using prescribed and compartmentalized, frozen and ultimately de-contextualized phrases and language functions. There is moreover no attempt to increase awareness of the dialogicality, the politics or the sociocultural appropriateness of such language. Contexts are presented as stable and singular and functions are shown to have an inherently transparent logic, and therefore, paradoxically, communicative language thus defined is continually deferred away from the dynamics of interaction and performance. While the argument – and promise – CLT makes by promoting its activities is that learners are ‘using’ the language, and not simply passively noting down and manipulating its structural properties, functional and notional language, like grammar before it, presents properties and patterns of language in pre-supposed situations: it pre-answers learners’ questions about ‘how would you say...in English (French, Thai etc.)?’ As such, these answers presume and define a linguistic rationale that implies communication is the easily interpreted and transferred application of a code.

Furthermore, because the functions of language in situations are presented as self-explanatory, it is felt that practice is all that is needed. This conflates the meaning and purpose of the learning activity back to the learning situation, that is, the context of

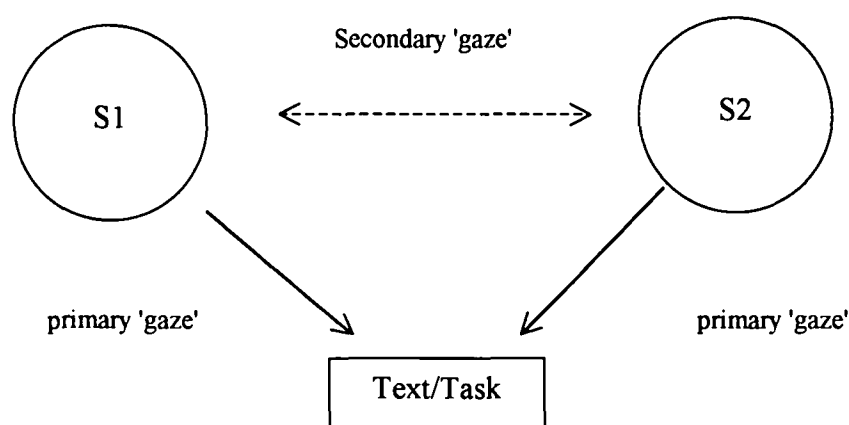


'learning'. In other words, when the focus is phrases and expressions, this caters not to socialized speakers who can already communicate, but just not in the target language, but to the (constructed) 'helpless, practicing learner'. Whereas learners are presumably communicating their needs and desires, getting things done and solving problems, the fact that learners may be practicing or even 'interacting' with each other overlooks the problem that whatever they are doing is framed as a language learning activity: there is no real feeling that the learner is achieving something useful for beyond the classroom and instead the tacit agreement learners are bound to is '*now you are learning about* how to make a request'. Indeed, there is no attempt to disguise this message, when in textbooks such as *True Colors* for example, learners are *told* that the textbook's contractual obligation has been fulfilled in one page of presentation and consideration (i.e. 'Now you know how to make requests'). This focus on learning rather than doing would not be inherently wrong were it not for the fact that it is crossing pedagogical messages.

Tasks, likewise, which appear to fulfill the requisite of 'doing something' with the language in a more purposive and sustained way, actually do nothing to challenge or to compare the learner's understanding of the broad context of the communicative act and much less attempt to analyze any (differing) socio-cultural forces being operationalized; again, they are doing something with a *code*, the logic of which is supposedly apparent. Even when learners are interacting, the fulfillment of the task takes precedence: while language is being used for a purpose, both the language and the purpose are superficial, empty and most significantly, self-referential.

CLT also neglects important aspects of learning processes, and the majority of learning activities are devoid of multiple 'entry' points and therefore the opportunity for epistemological progress for homogenous learners. All learners are expected to complete the tasks – and 'have fun!' – in the same way: deviation is thereby implicitly discouraged, and the logic, objectives and purposes of such practices, assumed to be obvious and right, are imposed. There are in fact no multiple approaches that cater to differing learning styles or strengths, and no 'play'. Learner's

heads are down, and they are focusing on The Text, or The Phrase, not The Other. This might be illustrated in terms of where the learner focuses her 'gaze' in the learning activity. While in communication the speaker's focus is on the other person<sup>2</sup>, so that the speaker/listener can adapt, negotiate and strategize how the interaction is to be played out, the learning activity makes the students (S1 and S2) focus primarily (i.e. the 'primary gaze') on the text and only secondarily on the listener/co-speaker:



*Figure 7.1: The Learner's Gaze and Focus in Task-based Activities*

It is also dubious as to whether communicative language learning caters to learner autonomy. No matter how much 'fun' or 'freedom' learners have in undertaking tasks, they still have to focus on completing the particular task in order to satisfy its demands, in other words, getting a right answer as determined by the task setter. Yet when someone determines what a task is, what it means, what it is intended to represent and achieve, and how it is to look in completed form, they are enforcing a pedagogical logic that can exclude the learner. The emphasis on and frequent demand for self-expression is for much if not most of the time a painful experience for teachers and learners alike: few things are as awkward as a teacher standing in front

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<sup>2</sup> Speakers do often of course need to strategize by directing the listener to the language itself, but still in light of the other person's reaction or response.

of a class of thirty students trying to hold a 'discussion' on, say, which jobs are more interesting than others, and why.

Indeed, many activities are clearly designed by people who have little experience in *learning* languages in classroom contexts themselves. At a psychological level, the intrinsic and inescapable sense of artificiality created by the injunction to enact a role play or to express one's opinion pervades the class, and often both learners and teachers are embarrassed. This is made worse by a striking yet overlooked feature of the majority of textbooks: their patronizing tone and content. Language learning textbooks imply that learners are simpletons because they do not speak the target language.<sup>3</sup> Books that are ostensibly intended for (young) adult audiences (as both *True Colors* and *New Interchange* are) call upon those learners to have supposedly relevant and interesting conversations on their favorite holidays and festivals (this is also obviously a 'culture focus' activity!). Yet, rather than being relevant – a common sales pitch for textbooks – many topics and themes seem so *irrelevant* or *childish* to learners that they might as well be considered surreal. They are socially meaningless even when they try to focus on predetermined student interests. Catering to such interests might also be seen as a rather patronizing way of trying to convince learners of the effort being undertaken and of course the legitimacy of the textbooks themselves. The use of cartoons and staged photos contributes to this overall effect, which demands that learners accept the message that 'simple' language requires simple and shallow presentation. (It is admittedly possible to blur the distinction between a textbook's layout – which is concerned more with promotional rather than pedagogical matters – and its contents, and thus to misdirect one's critique. Having said that, if the aesthetic aspects of the textbook take precedence over its pedagogical worth then a criticism of this imbalance is justified.) This does not mean however, that language learning activities should be serious and discuss only weighty or 'adult' topics. Rather, the criticism is that conversation topics themselves are planned and

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it would be interesting and worthwhile to analyze how learners are 'constructed' by the learning context and learning materials.

enforced, rather than emergent, and therefore cannot replicate or stimulate genuine, interesting or relevant discussion as such.

One thing that was not pointed out in the preceding sections was how a textbook's accompanying teacher's book is 'hidden' from learners. What function does this strategy have? While obviously it is necessary for the teacher to have an idea of what the student's edition requires in terms of presentation and procedure, it also has the effect of constructing an authoritative quality to the lesson where in fact there may be none. Teachers following a teacher's book could conceivably continue for a whole course by following the instructions without needing to question the content, or its methodology, or its legitimacy or relevance, or ultimately its effectiveness. The textbook in this way establishes its legitimacy outright and *a priori*, over both learner and teacher. The authority that the *private, sanctified* teacher's book endows the teacher with can serve to mask the instructor's inexperience or ignorance, giving the books therefore a power by default that they do not necessarily deserve.

Moreover, how tasks and activities are created often puts a strain on the credibility of the expertise of their designers. Approaches that are suggested by textbooks (or for that matter in journals), even if they can be reported to be 'successful', are often initiated on hunches, common sense justifications, and just as often, because they are fun. With the universal premise of 'make them talk', any activity that fulfils this requisite in some way is judged to be successful. Suggested tasks are often offered and sold in a 'try this, it works for me' tone and are sourced on perspectives that are equally spurious and speculative. There is remarkably little theoretical justification of tasks and activities (beyond the use of authoritative citations which likewise lack genuine legitimacy) and they have few theoretical and conceptual foundations. If they do it is not often thoroughly questioned whether the tasks that have been developed in the name of a theoretical approach can be said to truly represent them.

To summarize in terms of the principles that have been outlined, it has been shown that in a majority of communicative language learning activities:

1. there is no dialogic process. Despite the pairing or grouping of students, their main task is individualized so as to 'enable' each learner to produce evidence of producing language, not of responding to others expressions, meaning implications and so on. The learner's 'gaze' (cognitive, psychological, attentive), even in the pair or group, is always directed at the language and texts s/he is supposed to use, not at the other. The learner is constantly reminded of language and using it correctly, not of the communicative intention.
2. many activities considered to be communicative actually miss a vital ingredient: they are depersonalized in that the supposed language or text they are supposed to produce is 'external' in the sense that it is language intended to be representative of context, or situation X. In this way language is treated as abstract-but-not-abstract-enough as the sample sentences of grammar exercises. As such, language is divorced from negotiated, co-constructed communication.
3. activities and tasks *freeze* time and space relations because they are always presented as stable, mono-semantic, impersonal contexts, not as contexts involved in the flow or conversation of culture, as referring to co-constructed past events and memories.

CLT attempted to simulate reality. Yet, while aiming to focus on language 'as it is used on the street', it presented only a relatively delimited functional model of 'language in use'. In other words, a grammar of phrases (supposedly) replaced traditional grammar so that an enduring image of language as a code has essentially remained. Human relations, the wider social context, and above all, the cultural logics of many interactions and behaviors are left unanalyzed, unacknowledged, and untouched.

Moreover, if CLT emphasized language in particular contexts (buying something, ordering meals, asking directions), and developed methods whereby learners had to 'produce' communication, and weakened the dominant language-as-grammar perspective, this effected little more than a shuffling of the contents of an established hierarchy. If CLT began to look at context – and thus to a minor and mainly implicit

degree 'culture', the predominant and continuing discourse focused on the structural view of language. Language 'in use' constituted another addition, a supplement to language as a 'thing to be studied'.

As much as it was noble in its attempt, CLT did little, then, to question the pedagogic status quo at any fundamental level. It accepted the emphasis and conceptualization of 'linguistic language' as a dominant, objectified model (even if syntactic correctness was less rigorously stressed) for the foreign language learner to memorize, attain and acquire. Expression, history, the self, the other – all are as relatively neglected as preceding pedagogical schools of thought. Old models and frameworks prevail, and the theoretical foundations of old remain in tact. Rather than wholesale change that CLT was supposed to have brought about, there was never really a 'paradigm shift' as was suggested.

What a more 'radical' approach to foreign language pedagogy might look like is considered in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Toward a Framework of Culture in Foreign Language Learning**

Having made a critique of some of the common approaches, methods and tasks of communicative language teaching, it is time to turn attention to what actions would represent a significant 'correction' to them in terms of addressing both the need to foreground cultural awareness in language teaching, as well as taking into account the principles of learning and teaching that were developed in chapters 5 and 6. Thus, the aim in this chapter is to work toward a framework of culture and culture learning in the FLT context. In keeping with the underlying themes of contingency (i.e. the play of meaning), context, and even unpredictability in learning as well as (therefore) teaching, this framework is not presented as a universally applicable 'answer', but as a working model which synthesizes – in one interpretation – the principles outlined and with which the structural foundations of a pedagogical approach can be set in place: what the 'façade' or the 'building' should look like is a matter for local adaptation.

The epistemological and methodological principles of studying a foreign language and culture that were outlined in previous chapters were necessarily 'decontextualized' in the sense that they did not consider the 'real' conditions of the classroom. Some might argue that this negates the very possibility and reason for outlining them, since they appear to have no practical application. But they were

necessarily decontextualized from the *institutional* setting because, as chapter 6 argued, this setting is only a particular manifestation or construction of pedagogy, and not a transcendently 'right' one: therefore the aim has been to discover and outline the optimal conditions for learning. As noted in chapter 1, radical change in classroom procedure and approach – if it is supported by a strong theoretical foundation, is not impossible but simply not attempted because education is essentially conservative (Breen 1985): if it doesn't exist it doesn't mean it cannot, especially before one has even tried.

However, despite the spirit of optimism with which the following framework is presented it must still address a number of questions, including: what sort of model or approach can deal with the now more problematic issues of culture, language learning, social practice and socialization and – if necessary – can still be applied to the dynamics of formal education? What is the learner (and instructor) supposed to do or be in an institutional foreign language course? Even if we acknowledge the perspectivist nature of meaning, behavior and cultural manifestations and practices, what strategies can be employed for the student whereby sense can be made, performative competence developed, and meaning understood through reducing the range of possibilities of meaning and semiosis and interpretation? And, in reference to one metaphorical concept used in this thesis, what conditions enable rhizomatic learning, allow de- and re-territorialization? In pondering the answers, the aim is not to provide or make suggestions for specific activities or tasks, but to develop an environment in which the above questions can not only be addressed, but can continue to be discovered and asked.

### **8.1 Creating Histories and Spaces**

In chapters 4, 5, and 6 three 'macro' issues of culture, learning and instruction were addressed. None of these issues are exactly new to foreign language discourse, but rarely are they addressed as together comprising the foundational and guiding premises of our approaches. Thus, for example, while social constructivism, a highlighted learning theory here, has been introduced into the field, it has not been



used to reconceive the learning object itself – only the learning and teaching strategy. In this thesis, all three issues are seen as intimately and intricately related.

Before a framework is outlined therefore, it will be useful to recapitulate the principles of the thesis with reference to the terms used in its title: *creating histories and spaces of meaningful use*. It is now hopefully clear that the notion of creating histories and spaces implies a number of conceptual and practical requirements and consequences on a number of levels, and which reflect the complexity of the task of learning as well as teaching a foreign language that foregrounds cultural contexts and issues. These will be outlined here, and although the following will seem rather abstract, more concrete examples of the kinds of environments that are implied here will be provided in the sections to come.

### *Creating*

We might begin by considering each term individually and start therefore with a brief discussion of the notion of *creating*: what is implied by this term, and of course, who does the creating? Though the ratio between teacher and/or learner-as-creator depends on which particular theme (i.e. ontology, epistemology or ethical instruction) one is emphasizing, it is clear that both the instructor/institution and the learner play roles in fostering the learner's development and acquisition of semiotic and performative competence, though in various ways.

As an instructional imperative, creating histories and spaces is similar to the recently popularized idea of *facilitating* the learning experience, rather than *determining* it. This would mean, for one, removing the kinds of constraints to learning that institutional and administrative ideologies have erected, and placing in their stead conditions in which learners have more exploratory freedom in their learning approaches. That is, instead of *making* students learn, creating is as much as if not more about *letting* students learn.

As a learning process, histories and spaces need to be and *are* created, since it has already come to be understood that meaning, semiosis and understanding are active, constructive and dialogic processes: the learner co-creates with another speaker/listener (or, more inclusively, *habitus*) the communicative dimensions and practices of which s/he is part.

The notion of creating has both material and conceptual applications therefore. By creating, instruction would not only initiate change in structural terms and in the physical setting in which culture and communicative practices are presented, but would also create an ideological framework from which these and subsequent changes can be made: to create one must have a mindset that is geared toward innovation and change.

Indeed, this plays into another sense of the term, since creating implies by definition also a *creative* or inventive act. That is, rather than having a pre-conceived idea of what the final 'product' is and will be, and how it is to be achieved according to (someone's) plans and strategies, there must be a practice in which histories and spaces are spontaneously and randomly invented, insofar as the learner's meaning making mechanisms and semiotic networks (*rhizomes*) are personal, autobiographical and unique. Also, because the target culture is ontologically as well as physically distant, and in the Derridean sense absent, it must to a large degree be invented in order to make it present (and present it). Of course this is easier said than done. But this does not undermine the fact that it must necessarily stand as a requisite of the concept of creation.

### *Histories*

Of the notions of history and space, history is perhaps conceptually more straightforward on the surface, and indicates one of the main conditions necessary for social actors to become habituated to the range of logics manifested and demanded in their socializing trajectory. It is only through history, through historically specific engagement, that one can become acquainted with the network of ideological and

historical references, understand meaningful connections, implicatures and allusions, as well as partake in practices, discourses, and contexts in ways that are recognized by members of target cultures.

Creating *histories* is crucially different to the notions of getting 'experience' or 'practicing' where these are conceived linearly, accumulatively, and reductively. History should not be conceived of as a forward-moving dimension comprised of discrete events: to 'make connections' for example, one must refer to previous encounters, to make 'leaps' to multiple versions of reality. To strategize, after all, is to consider future consequences. Memory and foresight ensure that one does not accumulate, step-by-step a collection of self-evident and singular meanings, competencies, or understandings.

Histories are also integral to a person's 'autobiographical memory' (Monteil and Huguet 1999). That is, one's understandings and interpretations emerge from the sensorial and contextualized nature of events. Time is thus 'fundamental to the organization as well as to the coherence of the event' (Monteil and Huguet 1999: 24), and, as well as clearly implying that being historically embedded – rather than institutionally confined – is a central requirement for learning, it also upholds the claim that humans develop understanding of the world at an autobiographical level, even though they are socially embedded, and have experience only of the cultural and social artifacts and regulatory practices in which they act.

In chapter one it was noted that classroom procedures and constructs have the tendency to conflate time. There is a belief that language is and can be learned in a setting where communicative ability is 'squeezed' into the 'practical' confines of the activity, the lesson or the course. Creating histories is thus a concept that aims to counteract both the beliefs and the practices that promulgate and persist with this view of language learning and instruction. It is argued instead that ways must be found to 'inflate' the learner's range of experiences without necessarily demanding an inordinate amount of time for extra curricular activity (in the case where learning is

institutionally bound, and where other subjects are competing for learners attention). In other words, approaches must begin to think in terms of quality over quantity: how is it possible to facilitate conditions in which learners can strategize in their learning approaches, and have experiences which are more complete, holistic and rewarding, while at the same time providing analytic purchase?

### *Spaces*

Space, on the other hand, embraces a larger array of concepts, though it is always historically defined and constituted. It is often metaphorically invoked for example, when it is referred to in terms of 'entering' social 'fields' or 'internalizing' a practical logic, or of '*immersion* into a dialogue of cultures' (Savignon and Sysoyev 2002: 511 emphasis added)<sup>1</sup>, or when there is talk of people 'inhabiting' language or having language inhabit them. One might therefore refer to space in a more conceptual sense when referring to the sense of involvement, control or competence the speaker has in communicating his or her self. That is, the speaker has 'room to move' in various contexts and settings without feeling overly anxious as to appropriateness and intended meaning.

Deleuze and Guattari (1990) talk of 'striated' and 'smooth' space, where striated space is the realm of reality that is measured, quantified, diagrammed by what they call royal – that is official, state-sanctioned, science, and smooth or nomadic space is heterogeneous, 'nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicity' (Deleuze and Guattari 1990: 371), space that 'occupied without being counted' (Deleuze and Guattari 1990: 362). In the conceptually striated space of royal science, it is necessary to move from (knowledge) point to point, to master the variables of time and place and to extract laws (Deleuze and Guattari 1990: 372). In smooth space, the points are subordinated by the process, points are reached only in order to be left.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it may be interesting to consider more in-depth how space has been metaphorically constructed in recent FLL discourse.

Clearly the linguistic paradigm and logic of practice of FLT is dominated by the precepts of royal science. Though nomad science is not, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, necessarily better, it would act as a balance to the imperative to graph, coordinate and contour the language and learning experience that linguistics-based methodology imposes on learners. In this sense then, creating spaces refers to the notion of creating smooth space, in which learners can make their own maps, in which they (re-)territorialize at their leisure.

Another conceptual meaning of space (and its creation) can be seen in the notion of learners 'opening their minds'. In the attitudes and conceptual tools that learners utilize in their endeavor to grasp sociocultural practices of the target groups, the ability to increase their acceptance of variety and difference, as well develop the ability to 'rationalize' within the range of practical and communicative constraints of the target culture is a central necessity. It is not, as some would have it, an ability to 'think like' native speakers, but an empathetic awareness of the possible range of logics, interpretations of and reactions to events and meanings that fosters interpersonal communicative learning at the cross-cultural level.

Creating space, in turn, can also suggest developing the ability to stake one's claims in terms of relations of power. Since issues of dominance and hierarchy characterize all communication, learners must become capable of co-managing interactions by asserting and defending themselves: too much cross-cultural rhetoric addresses (the need for) harmony without acknowledging or addressing either the political nature of communication in all cultures (and unavoidably across cultures), or the omnipresent potential for conflict. As such there may often be a tendency to categorize and tolerate as culturally normative what is in fact unacceptable behavior. It is important therefore, to be able to carve out one's place in the cross-cultural field, with a knowledge of the appropriate (where this means both 'proper' and polite but also 'appropriately inappropriate', on occasion) of strategies that facilitate this.

Finally, space of course also refers to physical and corporeal space, though at least two applications of this may also be inferred. Since social existence always involves the body, one is not only kinetically tuned and spatially aware of others (e.g. body distance when interacting), but, as part of habitus the body is also morally constituted and defined, and has a relation to itself based on the perceptions of its socializing environment. As such, another aspect of cross-cultural learning is that learners need to become physically attuned to norms of comportment and bearing.

Learners also need material space to learn, and while there is consideration as to classroom layout, aesthetic, ambiance and architecture, this continues to be of relatively secondary interest. But given the corporeal, physical dimension in learning it is clear that learning space, within and beyond classrooms, can be arranged and utilized for optimal effectiveness. Otherwise culture and language learners will continue to be treated as 'brains on a stick'.

### *Meaningful Use*

For communicative language teaching meaningful use has been translated into activity that makes the learner talk, or to 'use' language to do something. However, little thought has been given to the subsequent worth and legitimacy of the purposes and functions these activities demand. It has been shown that ultimately such communicative activities in effect entail nothing more than the fulfillment of a language learning activity, and no sociocultural dimensions come into play (indeed, it seems they are preferably avoided as impracticalities).

'Meaningful use' however, is here considered exactly to emphasize this missing sociocultural dimension. That is, learners are not only to 'use' language for its own sake, but in order to complete interactive needs and chores that require the learner's own involvement. The pre-emptive nature of CLT tasks is such that they become activities whereby pre-learned (or pre-presented) phrases and words (and intonations, for example) are expected to be practiced and applied in controlled simulations. There is nothing personal in this, nor anything 'discoverable'. In activities where learners

are challenged to fulfill personal needs (even if they are pretend/simulated?) however, and where they need to consider the correct approach introduces other, more holistic communicative elements, at once complicating the process, but also at least ensuring greater genuineness.

An important additional clarification to this is that the need to create histories and spaces is not only *in order* to develop meaningful competence- that is personal *and* appropriate *and* relevant performative, at a later date, but that activities themselves involve the *consummation* of the (kinds of) histories and spaces one is engaged in, and inhabits. It is this dialogicality between immediacy and intention, between present need and expected outcomes that facilitates and even guides historicity. In other words, meaningful use is not (only) a consequence of learning activity intended to promote it, but meaning is emergent and integral to the activity and context itself. For this, pedagogy must provide opportunities and contexts for the learner to be a *communicator* rather than some kind of half-person sitting at a desk.

### *Summary*

Creating histories and spaces is analogous to and is facilitated by the creation of conditions and resources with which strategies and approaches can be formulated at cognitive, affective and practical levels. It is also about the conditions to create resources and the resources to create conditions.

It means changing the 'configurations' or even the 'coordinates' of institutional language study, so that learning other cultures and languages is not a process confined to (and in the service of) the four walls of a classroom, even when learning is institutionally arranged, nor therefore to the structures and configurations within it, nor therefore to the schedules, nor ultimately to the kinds of assessment that class-based courses generate. It means extending activities beyond that of the single class, across classes and outside classes and those activities the purposes of which is ultimately to do no more than reinforce and reconfirm the need for classroom logic. There is no reason why such an approach cannot still be considered as a systematic,

organized goal-based course. Changing the spatial and temporal conditions of a class and course are the primary means to facilitating learning conditions that access relevant materials and methods. You have to create or open space and time, in order to be involved in it, and thus acquire it.

Creating histories and spaces obviously does not necessarily mean 'more classes' or 'more contact hours' but rather it is about providing and dispersing the 'points of access' for learners. That is, for example, by genuinely and of course in a principled way, incorporating the wealth of possibilities that technology now provides in terms of software and networking.

Creating histories and spaces means extending – and permitting the extension of, the conceptual spaces of learners, teachers and program designers, so that innovative ways of conceiving, approaching and solving problems are entertained, tested, and experimented.

Creating histories and spaces, that is, in the plural, means engaging learners in multiple discourses, interactions and contexts that are personally significant. Knowing this does not make the task of foreign language and culture learning any easier. On the contrary, it makes the question of how pedagogy can create conditions of 'significance' all the more problematic. Nonetheless, equipped now with the principles that have been set out in this thesis, it is possible to visualize in more concrete terms how a framework for the study of culture in FLT might appear.

## **8.2 The Classroom Reconfigured: A General Approach to Designing a Principled Approach and Syllabus**

This section aims to synthesize the principles outlined in this thesis into a broad template for the creation of FLT syllabuses, activity designs and 'learning spaces'<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The use of 'classrooms' as in the title of this section, is essentially misleading, since learning, even institutionally, can take place beyond.



Specific examples of tasks therefore are not considered as necessary – and indeed would be reductive of other possibilities and applications. In other words, it is an important point to note that this chapter does not aim to provide a ready-made syllabus intended for immediate, uncritical and un-negotiated application in classrooms. Ethical and principled syllabus development is a slow and ongoing process that must be considered, patiently applied, and diligently pursued.

### **8.2.1    *Localization***

The *principles* and major arguments of this thesis are intended as universally applicable, viable and able to be enacted. That is, it is appropriate and viable that cultural aspects of foreign languages are brought to the fore in learning considerations and activities, that the target language and its sociocultural manifestations be treated intellectually rather than as ‘info-bits’ presented to passive students, and that there is constant vigilance regarding the epistemological as well as methodological claims made by pedagogical discourse and practice.

However, it is also clear that these principles themselves suggest and even demand a localized implementation because it avoids the tendency to universalize needs as well as content. Administratively, practitioners are obviously more able to take into account the strengths and weaknesses of their local conditions in social, economic, historical and political terms – there is no point designing computer-based syllabuses for example, when and where computers and internet connection are absent (or too slow). Given the inherent conservativeness both of general educational as well as more particularly language learning pedagogy, localized syllabuses can also be designed with extant learning and pedagogical paradigms in mind, so that the rate of change is not felt to be overly radical: redirection in the language teaching and learning paradigm should be sustained and long-term, and not adopted as a fashionable gesture.

In terms of content too, localized syllabuses make use of the immediate social and cultural (and geographical, political and so on) environment. Histories and spaces are

created when learners can make connections to and see immediate consequences of their actions in relation to their surroundings, rather than in relation to the sanitized and generic examples of standard textbooks (that make promises as to the 'relevancy' of their content to learners). Institutions need therefore need to develop 'templates' of activities that instructors and learners can adapt and go on to develop in line with their specific interests and needs. There also need to be *archives* of information that focus on socio-cultural discoveries of past courses that teachers and learners can draw on in their activities, projects, research and so on. In this spirit of archive-creation, institutions may wish to begin long-term projects which are added to by subsequent classes and years.

### **8.2.2    *Materials: Authenticity***

The notion of authenticity is a much touted and debated concept in FL education, since it is a problematic concept, and often tricky to define convincingly. To begin, it is a relative concept in that it is contextual: in the context of a class a sentence practice exercise produces authentic text, in the context of a course of study, tests are authentic. Even in sociocultural learning theory which, it has been shown, emphasizes participation in goal-focused activities the goal that is set may have little to do with real-life goals beyond the class.

What remains an important task then is to match the learning activity with the requirements of the objectives and goals that learners negotiate for themselves – but not (always already) preemptively. In order to be authentic, the cross-cultural learning activity must therefore be (or as closely as possible resemble) the characteristics of communication and interaction which were set out in chapter 4. In other words, an authentic activity must consist of dialogue in contexts in which meanings are emergent, motivated, connotative and affective, as well as denotative.

### **8.2.3    *A Time and Place to Learn***

Epistemologically speaking, the practical or logistical constraints that continue to dominate institutional learning and teaching will continue to hamper many students' potential to learn. Many if, not all learners of any age and subject are indeed thwarted in their efforts by being expected to conform to rigidly designed syllabuses, course materials, timetables, class environments etc. In this sense, education expects learners – and learning – to adapt to conditions and organization of its own convenience, rather than adapting to the students it ostensibly and ideologically serves. 'True' learning can occur anywhere and at any time, and while this may be recognized, very little has been done to take advantage of this fact.

Classrooms, class times, course dates, and all conditions arranged for the convenience of teaching would better serve and facilitate learning if it underwent significant if not revolutionary changes. This would not necessarily – and indeed it would be detrimental if it did – undermine the usefulness of having locations/classes in which learners can gather for instruction, to share, to listen, to speak. It must be emphasized, again, that education and pedagogy per se are not be challenged, but that its structure has outlived its original purpose – to make instruction available to all. With the growing availability and capability for technology, for example, not only to store vast amounts of information but also to transcend temporal and spatial constraints of traditional instruction, foreign culture and language learning stands to benefit – if applied wisely and in a principled manner, and care is taken that technologies do not become mere electronic substitutes of textbooks.

### **8.2.4    *Need Analysis, Problems and Problem Solving***

It is obvious perhaps that an important condition for any approach that involves problem-solving strategies is that they genuinely meet the learners' learning requirements. Can it be said that this is achieved in needs analysis research, which has a predetermined range of possibilities and definitions of what kinds of needs there are, and which go on to devise ways to satisfy them en masse and preemptively? Performative needs are more temporal and are therefore more specific, fleeting and

personal than such studies suggest. Rather than aim solely to address a homogenized core of needs for learners it is important that conditions be *enhanced* (since they occur naturally anyway) so that needs emerge in the course of a learner's cross-cultural 'becoming'.

Learners must not only to be able to address their performative problems and weaknesses as they arise, however, but be able to identify them within a non-reductive (i.e. purely linguistic) framework, since it is just as likely that due to a number of factors (not least of which is that they have been trained to see language in this way) learners also conceive of language learning as a problem of structure and correspondence and representation. For this they need to be made aware of various kinds of interpretive problems that are seen within linguistic, discursive, performative and cultural frames of reference.

Of course, it may well be that (many points of) grammar and other 'purely' linguistic issues do present significant and even primary problems for learners (though they will present themselves at various times in learner's studies). But it is not necessarily the case that even a grammatical need is satisfied by the presentation of grammatical fact – it may well be that the meaningfulness of the grammatical point becomes apparent from an entirely different and unpredictable source. The point therefore is not to limit their learning by forbidding the study of structure, or enforcing particular learning approaches, but to open the range of problems, perspectives and strategies to solve them. (For this reason of course, culture has not been set as the replacement of language in FLT courses, despite the need for it to be stressed as a central aspect of learning a foreign language.) Instead of presenting – by way of meeting anticipated needs – the standard bottom-up version of language, learners organically accumulate, overlapping layer by layer (rhizomatic node by node) their understanding of the target language environment. For this pedagogy must resist its overwhelming temptation to drive instruction and govern learning with easily measured and manipulable content (Wilson 1997). Equipped and empowered with the means to look at and identify problems that arise from various viewpoints, as well as allowing content and

objectives to emerge during instruction, learners have a better chance making their learning more meaningful, holistic and rewarding in terms of understanding.

### **8.2.5 Intellectual and Analytical Approach**

#### *Conceptual Tools*

Being 'equipped and empowered' is a matter of having a range of conceptual tools – explicitly employed – to apply to a problem. It is strange therefore, upon consideration, that institutionalized language pedagogy, especially at the tertiary level, is generally void of intellectual, analytical and critical activity: learners remain passive respondents to instructional demands, whether these demands are 'to communicate' in role plays, or to listen to grammatical input and repeat/apply it by rote.

It has been argued that the study of culture involves both the need to understand the logic of cultural practices at an emotive and affective level, as well as to approach such study with a considered, reflective and active learning framework. Thus, just as the job of sociology is to provide weapons not lessons (Bourdieu 1993a: 60), or as Deleuze and Guattari likewise argue, that philosophy is about developing concepts not answers, so to should FLT discourse aim to develop ideas and concepts which learners can adopt and adapt in their studies. To continue the practices that condemn learners by implying that they do not have, or cannot develop such an intellectual approach to language learning is to *a priori* constrain their potential, deny their ability and undermine their autonomy. Yet when concepts such as strategies, practices, habitus, patterns, values and assumptions, cultural reinforcement and reproduction, legitimization, and economic, religious etc. system, are examined with regard to a target group (as well as one's own), learners can attend to a broader field of analysis than rules and trivia.

We know now, and should be comfortable with the fact that the study of culture can not imitate the study of linguistic structure: we are not looking for a final,

paradigmatic or definitive representation of the target culture. Cultural rules cannot replace grammatical rules, first because they cannot not be formulated with any degree of personal contextualization – they do not fit into a scheme of the learner's reality or experience – and second because this disadvantages different learning speeds and ordering, thus denying the learner the opportunity to make meaningful and unpredictable connections at their own pace and liking: learners may use one concept at a time, or many, choose one before deciding it is not fruitful in solving a particular problem; there need not be faithfulness to any, and they be can changed at any time – and all the better if they are. Whereas in the traditional classroom this might make cultural analysis seem uncontrolled, chaotic, unsystematic and even a waste of time, the course of learning that 'opens its doors to the world' could accommodate such an approach. Indeed, concepts to be used do offer a strategic approach without being a closed one.

After all that has been said in relation to epistemological 'relativity' and learner autonomy, one possibly glaring contradiction that might be pointed out is the paradoxical notion of 'providing' conceptual tools. If instructors are to inform learners 'what to look for' or 'how to look for it' as such provision implies, then most of the conceptual work seems to have been done on their behalf already, leaving students only to complete, rather than necessarily 'engage in' the tasks set for them. That is, teaching students what the objects are, or how they are to conceive and classify them, entails having *a priori*, legitimized and authorized theories and constructs of the object to be researched. It brings us full circle to the beginning of the objectivist problem, perhaps having only reformulated what the object is. Similarly, providing students with the methodology of research can be seen as akin to pre-determining the 'correct' way of formulating an understanding of the *a priori* determined object.

There are a number of responses one can make to pre-empt such a criticism. First we might make note of the fact that 'all human knowledge is dependent upon classification' (Jenkins 2000: 7). One of the first concepts learners need to be aware

of therefore is the very fact that epistemologically s/he is already classifying the other with the concepts his/her culture has made available. If this is not acknowledged, not dealt with, not conceptually resolved, then the learning of another culture would be but a small step removed from the condition in which learners treat the target language as a codified version of their own. It is accepted, moreover, that simply observing human actions – seeing ‘what people do and say’ (Meyer 1991: 137) is an oversimplified way of studying culture. It is in order to make a move *toward* transcending one's worldviews and *toward* objectivity (since neither is ever truly attainable), as well as in order to see other practices as complex as they are, that the conceptual tools of the human sciences can be accessed.

Conceptual tools therefore, should not be equated with rules to be applied to determine an object, but rather as an intellectual approach that encourages critical thought and sustains a level of reflexivity. This does not come naturally and must be made explicit through instruction and learning. But this must be done with care. Davson-Galle offers a caution with regard to constructivist pedagogy by noting that constructivism should not ‘repeat the errors of Inquiry Learning with its excessive emphasis placed upon the individual’s conceptual resources and upon simple-minded induction as methodology’ (Davson-Galle 1999: 206) and argues that learner’s must become acquainted with ‘current concepts and hypotheses’. This applies to the study of foreign cultures.

There is also the fact that language pedagogy has itself always employed and implied conceptual tools in its execution. Without repeating arguments, the notions of ‘language’ and its ‘elements’ have been part of the staple diet of learners’ experience for many decades – and without either the explicit mention by experts nor consequently, with learners’ ‘consent’. If concepts are to be openly introduced in cross-cultural analysis then the least that can be said is that this would be an honest practice that makes itself open to more discourse and discussions.

In sum, providing students with conceptual tools is neither a theoretical or methodological incongruity with the development of a learner-centered curriculum and environment. If learners are given the means to acquire knowledge, this is not providing knowledge itself. The notion of 'conceptual tools' therefore, properly understood as aids in the (load) reduction of a vast and seemingly impenetrable cultural reproduction, is no more (or less) than one aspect of an approach to learning another culture and language.

### *Intercultural Criticism and Reflexivity*

overcoming ethnocentrism in social theory involves not just appreciating differences but coming to terms with incommensurable practices...It is commonly assumed that the appropriate approach to cross-cultural understanding...is simply to suspend critical judgment (Calhoun 1996: 80).

In anthropology, ethnography and the social sciences in general, critique or criticism of another culture has for many years almost been taboo or at least a controversial practice. With the rise of the tenets of cultural relativism and the realization that any description of the other is necessarily a political act, it has become all too easy to accuse any attempt to critique cultural groups other than one's own as being ethnocentric. Cook suggests that the original motive for coining the term 'ethnocentrism' was to identify and condemn 'a certain kind of *unfair* or *unwarranted* judgment that we tend to make of other peoples' (Cook 1978: 309-10 emphasis in original), but that this original meaning has mutated into a dogma which can be used to condone or be indifferent to such events as 'mass murder or other forms of unmitigated evil' (Cook 1978: 310).

Foreign language teaching has been equally if not more averse to cross-cultural critique, to a point where it is often neglected altogether. Risager (1991), cited in Chapter 3, points out that in general FL pedagogy there are 'no hints at connections or contradictions, or invitations to critical analysis, not even in the mother tongue' (Risager 1991: 188), and that authors aim to present their texts objectively and



neutrally, so that little critical reflection is ever encouraged or evident in foreign language study.

The main reason there is an absence of critique stems from the fear that learners develop negative attitudes of the target culture, and this is understandably a legitimate concern. But if we bear in mind that 'negative' or 'wrong' here means 'unduly critical,' 'prejudiced' or generally negative without a reasonable basis, then there is no reason why balanced discussion and consideration of controversial topics or significantly incommensurate practices or ideologies cannot be undertaken. It would at any rate be unreasonable, utopian and indeed perhaps unsafe<sup>3</sup> to expect learners to emerge with unrealistically positive and fulsome views of the other. Institutionally based culture teaching can be comfortable in making a goal of facilitating (though not enforcing) positive attitudes toward studying, learning about and interacting with the other, without, however, preemptively denying the opportunity for learners to come to terms with the cultural aspects that ultimately comprise the greatest obstacles in cross-cultural tolerance and understanding. Indeed, it is clear that this would not only be counteractive, but contradictory to the whole program of learning about the other<sup>4</sup>.

One must also recall that social groups are not free of internal criticism and self-analysis – otherwise they would never change, and in most major cultures practices and values are often subjects of discussion, targets of criticism, or even simply topics of humor. Should these cultural practices, in which various forums of debate and critique are held (the media comes to mind), be ignored by the cross-cultural learner? Or would they in fact provide a useful insight when it comes to taking an analytical stance? Would they not provide a means also to analyze not only what, but also how dispute and critique is expressed and forwarded? Thus, because 'No culture has a

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<sup>3</sup> All cultures engage in practices that are rude, offensive, and aggressive. Few would argue that this should be tolerated because one is a stranger. The trick here is not to tolerate, but to manage the situation and emerge unscathed.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the political and dialogic nature of communication presumes, indeed necessitates, both positive and negative - and rarely neutral - reactions to human interaction, and we cannot nor should not attempt to thwart or atrophy this process

monopoly of virtue [and therefore] no culture can be immune from critique' (Young 1996: 172), an intellectual approach to foreign culture learning critique becomes essential.

A more significant challenge that arises out of this however is ensuring that the object or practice of the critic's eye is indeed correctly perceived: 'Difficulties emerge...when critics from another culture do not understand what it is they think they are criticizing (Young 1996: 172). How is it possible then to separate critical thinking from criticism when we leave our students to interpret that which they research? We want both to avoid that learners approach the target culture without any theoretical understanding of cultural constructs and differences, and that they acquire trivial or negative understanding of them by applying their theories.

While the question as to who exactly the attempt to understand, 'write' or describe the other serves (for example, the state or the capitalist) continues in postmodern anthropology, this problem need not be transferred, at least in this form, to FLT, since it is clear why and who this understanding will serve: the learner of the language (even if the learner then goes on to become a servant of the state or a capitalist exploiter!). Having said this, it is for also for these reasons that ELT is deeply embedded in a cross-cultural political discourse, in terms of how it is partaking in cultural and linguistic imperialism. (Pennycook [1994] gives this issue a worthy treatment.)

Finally, in tandem with looking outwards to groups deemed to be different enough to necessitate cross-cultural analysis, understanding can only approach coherence and balance if the critical gaze is also turned inwards. Indeed, most scholars interested in CIFLL have recognized as a vital ingredient in the development of tolerance and appreciation of others the need to understand one's own performative, epistemological, ideological make-up in terms one's cultural and social history. Thus, knowing *that*, as well as *how* one's 'personal' reality and behavior is a habitus that has emerged from and is framed by social experiences and realities set very much

within a cultural backdrop, diminishes a level of ethnocentricity that automatically considers personal reactions and interpretations as representative of 'good' and 'right' and 'normal' behaviors and practices. Thus the cross-cultural analyst must first be 'humbled' by applying the same conceptual tools and turning the same critical gaze upon herself. Moreover, reflexivity is important for learners to gauge their progress and honestly estimate their own success according to the standards they or others have set for their learning.

*(Armchair) Ethnography and Anthropology*

The argument, such as forwarded recently by Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991), that learners (should or could) become ethnographers, is tantalizing and worthy of much more consideration than can be given here. However, while such an approach might appear to present an ideal solution, it would often be practically impossible, and in many cases undesirable, both for ethnographic subjects and cross-cultural learners. It is better therefore, to suggest that learners as much as possible adopt an ethnographic attitude, or to paraphrase Holliday an 'ethnographic imagination'. In this way, learners' perspectives are broadened to include much more of the context of the performative and communicative act. The 'ethnolinguist', for example:

sets out to describe and analyse the relationships which hold between a social groups, culture and language...he or she studies a particular group's universe as it is organized and vehiculated through and in language and the way in which members of the group themselves view the nature, status and use of language (Riley 1988: 25)

In an ethnographical approach moreover 'differences are not simply read off from behaviour and compared within one's *own surface memory* of a similar event in one's home country, but as far as possible are interpreted thickly and then compared with a detailed analysis of one's own cultural world (Barro, Jordan and Roberts 1998: 81, emphasis added). Thus ethnography seen in this sense lends itself to the need to a more thorough comparison of learner and target culture realities.

### *Hypothesis testing*

Papaefthymiou-Lytra's (1995, see section 3.1.3) injunction to develop a 'working hypothesis' of the target culture, can be seen to present another important element in cross-cultural analysis. However, instead of using the singular ('*a*' hypothesis of *the* culture), hypothesis testing needs to be more specific and multiple. That is, instead of resting with the results of previously undertaken research, it is important that learners (individually or in groups) and instructors formulate hypotheses of other cultural behaviors and practices and then look for confirming and contrary accounts and examples. In this approach (reminiscent in fact of Popperian positivism) stereotypes are neither created by institutional practices nor sustained by individuals (or institutions) as they go about 'proving' or 'disproving' their personal understandings and perspectives. In a hypothesis testing approach sociological findings, ethnographic descriptions, anecdotes and narratives (personal or by others), observations, indeed any source or description can be considered as sources of cultural information and understanding. The learner is thus given reign to formulate an understanding that compares and contrasts to their own previously held positions.

### **8.2.6    *Summary***

In sum, the main proposals that have been made in this section have focused on individualization, and in acknowledging of personal and multiple realities and learning patterns and needs. This is in keeping with the loosely postmodernist approach that was used in formulating the major principles of this thesis. Another major argument has been that a CIFL course should promote a more 'intellectual' attitude among learners and instructors, in contrast to the majority of courses which practice 'feeder' and passive learning of intellectually unchallenging information and mundane activities.

In emphasizing such an intellectual approach however, it has not been forgotten that learning is a personal, that is, affective, historical and subjective process. Thus, there needs to be a balance between a purely intellectualized approach, in which learners apply conceptual tools, and adopt rational, objective attitudes to the target culture and

an approach in which learners are exposed to the felt realities of performance and communication in a cross-cultural context. To this end, Young provides an indication of the direction language and culture pedagogy should proceed that in many ways reflects and complements the kind of approach that is being advocated here:

Learning intercultural communication would proceed better if it proceeded through relatively complex and carefully constructed simulations of culturally embedded institutional talk contexts, and focused not on rules but on strategies and critique (Young 1996: 182).

### **8.3 Toward Genuine Student Autonomy, Discovery and Negotiation...Flexible Learning?**

It is clear that one of the prevailing interests in this thesis has been that of ensuring the personalization and 'empowerment' of foreign language learning and learners. Indeed, it has hopefully been implied and stressed enough to indicate that it should be a central issue in any learning course. But while autonomy is, as Pennycook (1997: 39) argues, an 'unquestionably desirable goal', the variety of interpretations – conceptually and practically – of the notion means that it is far from being a resolved issue, and needs development and clarification.

#### *Definitions*

Learner (or student) autonomy is a concept that is widely and passionately debated in FLT discourse, a situation worsened by the various possible interpretations of what autonomy actually means and what it looks like in the institution. For example, an important distinction that needs to be made is between autonomous learning and what is called a learner-centered focus. While the former does suggest a degree of independence – from something or someone, the latter term need not: learner-centered is often and largely taken to mean a focus on learners' interests or greater classroom participation, but this does not undermine the curriculum's or teacher's authority, since it is quite possible that methods and activities are directed determined and governed in traditional ways.

This has been shown to be the case in CLT. Savignon (1990: 210) exemplifies the confusion by writing for example that learner-centered instruction 'by definition...puts the focus on the learner. Learner communicative needs provide a framework for elaborating program goals in terms of functional competence'. Yet upon closer examination it is notably the learner who seems to be missing from this equation, it is after all *learner needs* – presumed to be generic and universal, and not learners-as-individuals that are the object of interest. In the end therefore, instruction and its design can proceed in the traditional hierarchical manner: 'program design and implementation depend on negotiation between policy makers, linguists, researchers, and teachers' (Savignon 1990: 210). Holliday makes a valid point therefore, when noting that 'Even the so-called 'learner-centered' communicative approach is liable to 'methodization', imposing a packaged classroom ideal on students' (Holliday 1996: 238).

Benson and Voller however go into more depth regarding autonomy as being a notion that not only focuses on the learner (given the relative weakness of the CLT interpretation, one might ask who was the focus *before* so-called learner-focused instruction), but imbues the learner with a degree of *independence* from the hegemony of curriculum design. They present five main ways of discussing autonomy:

1. for *situations* in which learners study entirely on their own;
2. for a set of *skills* which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
3. for an inborn *capacity* which is suppressed by institutional education;
4. for the exercise of *learners' responsibility* for their own learning;
5. for the *right* of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

(Benson and Voller 1997: 1-2, emphasis in original)

In the context of the current discussion, all of these definitions need to be seen as complementary, rather than as separate interests, since they centre on the idea of learners being naturally, physically or administratively 'free' from the standard and traditional constraints of the classroom and teacher. As such, these readings can serve as the operational definitions of learner *autonomy*, not learner-centered instruction

which aims simply to take the (generic and universal) learner into account when it comes to classroom practice.

*Politics and Culture in Autonomy*

Despite firm evidence and theoretical support, the actual creation of a context in which there is a high(er) degree of learner independence is hindered by pedagogical politics, with the interests of both teachers and learners being the stakes. In pedagogical discourse, teachers and scholars seem often to equate the call for autonomy with the demand to reduce the need for instructors, and ultimately therefore the demise of the teacher-expert. In consequence, they instinctively denounce learner autonomy in an act of self-preservation. For this reason those with the power to determine learning objectives and outcomes (administratively, not epistemologically) work to ensure that autonomy is applied at a manageable and controllable level. Benson notes that autonomy is therefore relegated as a supplementary teaching practice – often in the form of Self Access Centers where learners can use computers, rather than a whole and holistic new approach. Learner autonomy, in other words, 'threatens vested interests and its reduction to a technical level can therefore be seen as a political act' (Benson 1997: 28)<sup>5</sup>.

In terms of learners' interests, one of the main concerns is whether autonomy is a Western and/or liberal-humanist value, and therefore an ethnocentric ideal. If it is, scholars wonder whether it can, or should, be universally applied (Benson and Voller 1997; Holliday 1994, 1997; Pennycook 1997; Riley 1988). There are certainly legitimate concerns that the educational ideals and values foreign (English/American etc.) teachers bring to classrooms can present difficulties to learners accustomed to different practices and values. Autonomy may well be one such foreign ideal, so that

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'empowerment', which is often associated with autonomy, is therefore a loaded concept, since in using terminology such as 'empower' or 'emancipate,' implies that, as McMahon (1997) puts it, power were in the learner's *future*, and moreover implies that power is transferable or, worse, treated as a kind of reward (or punishment).

foisting upon learners the responsibility of managing their own learning would simply not be viable in some cultures where the master-learner relationship is absolute and unquestioned, or where content definition or assumptions of learning (e.g. language-as-code) are unchallenged, or even where institutions cannot afford technologies and support structures to construct different environments.

There is no doubt that an acceptance of autonomy, defined as learner independence or control regarding content, method and even assessment, demands not only a significant restructuring of institutional procedures, but also an ideological shift – possibly major: ‘individualization represents a *pragmatic* solution to the problem of diversity of needs, but the changing roles for teachers and learners that this solution entails calls for an *ideological* change in the way the education process is viewed’ (Sheerin 1997: 54, emphasis in original). It must be remembered however, that education is a form of (ideological) socialization. It would follow that the FL class which is fronted by a foreign teacher (in an FL rather than SL context), would provide an opportunity to establish and confront learners with the cultural educative styles of those teachers who ‘represent’ the culture and language they are learning. While this idea of confrontation may sound insensitive, it must be borne in mind that if the administrative stakes (exams, grades and results) of the class are diminished, thereby assuaging learners’ fears of not being able to cope, the cross-cultural dynamic would establish both fertile ground for exploration, as well as a minor form of culture shock, as learners try to adapt to new conditions. It is more the institutions therefore, more than the learners’ or teachers’ cultures who act as impediments to cultural analysis and experience, both in terms of their structure and ideology. Ironically then, when they limit the ‘cultural input’ from foreign instructors by explicitly and implicitly demanding a language only focus, they are not utilizing the full potential of the ‘human resources’ they employ for their native status.

As a consequence, a distinction must be made between cultural learning styles and cultural teaching styles. If all humans learn through social interaction, then there should be no conflict in following the suggestions made here as to facilitating the



learning process. It is only a change in terms of *instructional* culture, and much less learner culture per se, that learner's might find difficult to adapt to – but to which ultimately they *would* adapt and accommodate given time and empathy.

### *Paradoxes, Problems and Criticisms*

In considering culture as a learning object, and autonomous learning an educational ideology, it is not long before one encounters the seeming contradiction whereby culture learning – which suggests some form of acculturation and socialization, seem antithetical to arguments supporting individualization. The question 'how does an autonomous learner become socialized?' seems to pose a kind of Cartesian problem as to how the individual world-created-by-the-mind can be similar to other minds. However, this paradox is quickly solved by clarifying the fact that autonomous learning should not be equated with *isolated* learning: there is nothing to suggest that learners must physically (or conceptually) remove themselves from others in order to be autonomous. Indeed, just the opposite better serves the concept – the *more* people learners can come into contact with who can act as informants and sources of both explicit and behavioral feedback, the more they are independent from instruction while at the same time randomly accumulating historical and contextually embedded experience.

Nonetheless, in pedagogy in which learners are encouraged to direct their own learning, there are other problematic issues. Hammer (1997) for example points out the tension involved between covering the content and letting Ss 'discover' the content intended – a situation which becomes more complicated when learners discover something that is incorrect (see also Davson-Galle 1999). While Hammer writes from the context of a physics course (in which students falsely 'discover' what is known not to be conductible is conductible), this tension can easily apply to the learning of foreign behaviors and meanings: conclusions as to what a particular behavior or interaction most commonly means can be misinterpreted (or when students over-generalize 'common' meanings that are deliberately flaunted, such as in humor); meanings too can be wrong, or at least so misapplied as to lead to false

perception and understanding and ultimately inappropriate behavior. Even with systematic and well-considered methods learners may make wrong conclusions, so that, in short, 'teachers should not assume good inquiry will lead to correct knowledge' (Hammer 1997: 490).

Moreover, giving learners 'free reign' to discover the target culture can become problematic if it takes them on such tangents and flights as to be inappropriate or ineffective from both epistemological, ethical and pedagogical perspectives. It may be fine for a learner to choose the topic of 'sport' or 'football' as the gateway to the target culture, but perhaps not to the point where the learner uses the topic as an excuse to do nothing but view football matches!

There is also concern for how independence is enabled or encouraged, particularly when, as is wont, it is seen to be no more than as a need to offer diverse study materials, or a supplement for traditional teacher-led activities. In self-access centers, which are the most common materialization of the concept, 'autonomy is too often reduced to choices about which video to watch or which tape to listen to' (Pennycook 1997: 42). Sheerin points out that the transference of what instructors have traditionally done in class to materials in self-access conditions are 'antithetical' to notions of learner independence. As such, 'Self-testing materials can satisfy the aim of 'individualization' very well, but they do very little to promote learner independence' (Sheerin 1997: 60).

### **8.3.1    *The Good Language Learner***

Many students achieve the capacity and ability to interact in the foreign language more quickly, more confidently and more comprehensively than others. These are what are called the 'good language learners' and they have been the subject of many analyses and much speculation. The reigning logic behind research into how they achieve higher rates of success is that if it is possible to understand their learning processes and strategies, then it might be possible to somehow distribute such strategies to all. It is a reasonable assumption in many ways, but it is also unfair.

From epistemological and methodological viewpoints it can be seen that these 'good' and 'successful' learners may have only been fortunate enough to encounter conditions that have suited their needs and styles, or that they have best adapted to what has been offered. If we flip the coin and are honest however, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the 'bad' learners often reflect our *inability* to teach foreign languages, rather than only accepting credit for the good learners as a reflection of successful approaches and practices. Indeed, the 'bad' learners are more deserving of our attention.

But this does not mean 'more of the same' for bad learners, as though what they lacked is more and more intensive drilling, and neither should it be taken to suggest that all that is required is some form of reversal of approach (assuming it were so logically simple) so that inequalities are overturned. Rather, it suggests that a support structure be created where all learners have the opportunity to approach the study of the FL/FC on their terms and in material conditions that they can discover their needs and develop ways of solving them in the time and space it takes rather than in the times and spaces that have been allotted.

### **8.3.2     *The Role of the Teacher***

CLT and related pedagogies have been instrumental in changing the vocabulary regarding the teaching role. They suggest that teachers should be facilitators, guides, coaches, coordinators and even midwives (von Glasersfeld 1996), instead of dispensers of truth or fountains of knowledge. Indeed there is little to criticize in this ideology from the standpoint developed here, and the decentralization (even if currently it occurs more at the theoretical than the practical level) of the teacher's influence over the learner must obviously be considered as a major aspect of any institutional reform toward autonomy.

Yet often these terms remain a little too abstract to provide any concrete image of what the teacher is supposed to do. How does one 'facilitate' in contrast to teach, for example? In preference to adding to the list of terms and metaphors then, it is more

important to outline more specifically what steps instructors can take in order to ensure open and negotiated instruction that gives room for learner autonomy. To begin, it is necessary to emphasize that, contrary to many unfounded fears, autonomy-based curricula still need guidance and management. The teacher *can* be seen to have expertise, and *is* there to guide learners away from unnecessary digressions (if he or she can legitimately state why a course of action would be unproductive and another more productive). The teacher *is* there to ask evermore questions for the learner to consider and go about finding the answers to. The teacher *is* there to ensure that strategies and practices remain concerted and coherent, but for learning rather than administrative reasons. The teacher should be asked questions, be available, to make available multiple ways of approaching a problem and perhaps most importantly, to provide feedback.

Because culture and cultural analysis is to become a much greater part of the learning experience, there are additional or supplementary activities that teachers would need to be able to undertake. Stemming from this realization, one important concern in the teaching of culture is whether teachers should be expected to have knowledge of cultural concepts and theories traditionally associated with the work of anthropologists and social theorists. The answer is yes, and others agree:

if cultural studies are understood to have a critical, political, emancipatory purpose – rather than a supposedly value-free one – then the teacher should, it may be claimed, have a training in the social sciences and not just in literary criticism, as has been the tradition (Byram 1989: 64).

Among other practices, this would entail that teachers have an awareness of fundamental issues in cultural analysis, that they can outline and teach research techniques as well as their epistemological and practical pitfalls. It would also mean that teachers themselves could undertake or assist in research for students' more difficult-to-obtain needs. Indeed, all of this would imply that on many levels – reflexive as well as analytical 'the teacher cannot afford to be anything but a researcher' (Holliday 1994: 31). In short, if language study is to become a more

intellectual enterprise, teachers too need to develop more questioning and critical perspectives than seems largely to be the case.

The immediate question that follows is whether these suggestions demand a greater workload of instructors. In terms of teacher training this would certainly be the case, since part of their training would need to be devoted not only to teaching techniques – and re-defining them – but also to the task of cultural and critical analysis and reflexive awareness. (This in turn requires of course that teacher trainers are adept at these practices.) For the class however, the need to have a more holistic view of cultural and communicative practice need not necessarily demand more work: it is a different orientation to it that would represent the biggest change. But when research is for many teachers normal practice for example, they would need only to consider exemplifying material with different analytical concepts, or choose material that is not only ‘text for text’s sake’ but is illustrative of wider discourses and cultural processes. For example, instead of looking for samples of linguistic use in newspapers, the same newspapers can be considered in terms of constructing discourses or assuming common understandings, viewpoints or readerships. Similarly, the daily cartoons, which are occasionally presented as conveniently small examples of conversation or linguistic practice, actually contain a wealth of information in terms of cultural practices and the contextual or cultural background needed to interpret them. Thus, in combination with less teacher-centered classes, the teacher’s load need not be quantitatively greater. It is qualitatively, in terms of regarding more than linguistic factors when preparing sessions that the teacher may be expected to do more.

In sum, the role of the teacher who steps down from the podium is to find a balance between outright didacticism and complete learner freedom. There is no reason for instructors to abdicate all explanatory assistance, renounce interpretation or opinion, or forego controlled activities, when learners have equally the chance and ability to self-direct their learning, pursue their own projects and interests, forge lines of flight.

### **8.3.3    *The 'Learning Contract' in FLT***

Where autonomous learning differs most significantly from teacher-led learning is that the 'necessary guidance and management' (see above) within a learning course is more distributed to the learner. Thus, autonomy carries with it responsibilities for the learner that go beyond those of being obedient and passive. If students are to have the 'freedom to learn' as Rogers says, then they must also be capable not only of undertaking intellectual work such as applying analytical concepts and researching, but also assuming the responsibility to organize their work and work load (Barson 1997).

In contrast to usual practices of roll-call or giving attendance marks, for example, Rogers (1969) makes the valuable suggestion that learners should be able to negotiate their work load, thereby drawing up 'contracts'. That is, rather than homogenize a learning course by insisting on the (ultimately impossible) similarity of learning strategies, objectives and outcomes, individual learners should be empowered largely to determine their own objectives and the procedures, strategies and tasks they will perform. Negotiation takes place to ensure that learners first of all begin their 'courses' with an interest in their own learning. However, it is also a method in which learning loads are kept fair and reasonable (i.e. so as to avoid learners undertaking a minimum amount, or teachers demanding too much). Evaluation and assessment of learners' abilities is then undertaken according to their individualized objectives, and not structured in a competitive and hierarchical format.

There are some provisos however that need to be established to ensure that negotiation is indeed made possible. If negotiation is to become a successful practice, teachers would need legitimately to (be able to) respect learners' choices. Too often negotiation is a symbolic or token effort with the course receding to centralized objectives and tasks. However, and this is most important, in order for negotiation to be genuine it is vital that it is not only practically but also conceptually possible for learners. That is, encouraging learners to negotiate assumes – as with the identification of problems and needs – that they *can* negotiate, and know what to

negotiate for<sup>6</sup>. For this reason, well-intentioned instructors will often have an honest ambition to negotiate with learners, only to be faced with muted or even indifferent responses. Though this may partly be due to their (learners) feeling that it may only be a token gesture, it is more likely that such responses are made simply because learners have no idea as to what to negotiate for, both in terms of activities, or objectives and assessment. It is vital therefore, that learners be pre-prepared to negotiate, so that they understand not only the range of options available for negotiation, but also their strengths and weaknesses in terms of competence and learning strategies. Negotiation then, is not a real possibility for the first few sessions, but needs to be planned. Learners can only be considered to be empowered to negotiate when they *know what they want and can have*, not simply when they are asked, and it is then that the learning contract becomes a viable pedagogical option.

#### **8.3.4 Goals and Objectives: Who Wants Who To Get Where?**

##### *Epistemological and Ontological Goals*

If cultural awareness is a more centralized or emphasized pedagogical orientation in a foreign language course, what can be said to be the learner's goal? In principle, it is firmly and widely agreed that the goal of pedagogy is not to *force* the learner to 'become a native', especially in the case of English as an International Language 'whose culture becomes the world itself' (Alptekin 2002: 62). To argue otherwise one would need to be prepared to demonstrate that a 'model speaker' exists (with model ideas and ideals and behaviors) beyond hegemonically instituted myths, and then to argue that it is possible to actually emulate or 'be' such a model. Clearly, this thesis has not been prepared to adopt such a position, not least because it would represent a glaring contradiction to argue that cultural meanings and practices are plural, dynamic and organic and then to assert that the learner must acquire *the* categorized and categorizable knowledge needed to enter such a system. It would moreover undermine any notion of learner autonomy in the sense that they themselves choose their 'goals' – and their ways of achieving them.

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<sup>6</sup> This point was made by Prof. Andrew Lian, personal communication.

At the same time it remains important to reconsider some of the arguments made against the notion of native speaker, and as a result perhaps to reconceptualize the learner's goal. For one, there are important disclaimers that must be directed to those who critique the notion of the native speaker outright. In their concern to in a sense protect the FL learner from expectations of 'becoming native' on the basis that a true native does not exist, they are a) denying that cultures and societies do create identities and construct a range of possibilities of their meaning, behavior and expression b) thereby in effect denying the sense of identity of the people they intend to understand, and c) overlooking the fact that successful communication, or communication that 'works', does take place with a conceptual, logical and performative grounding of interlocutors that for all intents and purposes seem shared, or perhaps better, are the result of what might be called 'proximal histories', that is, where people can refer to the same historical moments and events through having lived them together, even though they may have understood them differently.

Second if, as in the case of English as a lingua franca, non-native speakers treat English as an instrumental language without concerns for cultural significance they are in effect using English as a code of their own language, as Byram has remarked. Thus, two non-native English speakers representing their 'own' cultures would be more likely to have communicative and interpretive problems, which might sufficiently be overcome if they had, or agreed to adopt a version of an 'English' habitus for the duration of their interaction. Should they not wish to, then it would be important for them a) to be aware of their own manners and mannerisms, values and assumptions, discursive styles, so as to be vigilant against possible misinterpretations of their meanings, and b) be 'transculturally' aware that their speaking partner will likewise have particular styles and therefore tolerate or double check points of ambiguity.

Another point is that while it is agreed that the learner should not be compelled to become the native, this does not challenge or change that fact that in many ways 'de-nativization' is inevitable. As opposed to nativization, whereby the learner is



somehow expected to become or conform to an ideal, de-nativization stresses the fact that any learning fundamentally challenges the established cognitive and behavioral models of actors. That is, learning another language and hence epistemology must eventually and unavoidably entail a 'deterritorialization', a line of flight moving away from the uncritical, unreflective cultural state of one's cultural perspectives and in a direction *toward* a representation aligned with the Other. If the ability to understand and perform in ways that make sense to those of other cultural backgrounds requires an epistemological transformation, then it is not a matter of becoming someone *else*, but certainly a question of 'becoming' – that is, an always deferred point of arrival – and a question of 'becoming *yourself*' in another world. As Calhoun (1996: 80) writes, the practices of the Other 'can only be fully and simultaneously understood if there is some transformation of the knower...translation is too static a model for the process of coming to an understanding across lines of deep difference'.

The process of 'coming to know', therefore, which never results in fully knowing (given that fully knowing is unknowable!), is one of change, though not from one state to another. Arguments that would deny the learner this process have not grasped the fluidity of that which they want to protect, namely 'identity', for they assume that it is so stable as to warrant defending against another cultural, identity *bloc*. This contradiction is implied, but it is there nonetheless, for these scholars cannot escape from the notion of language as code or cognitive unit.

When considering what the goal of the learner is then, one should in fact *not* prescribe or define a conclusion to learning, or outline a model of culture which has components and parts that are ceaselessly challenged only by those (i.e. experts) whose existence depends on the very act of construction. For it is when there is no act of striation by *others* (i.e. experts and teachers) that the study of culture by the *learner* can be seen to involve an exploration of the experiences, the tensions and pressures, the relations and relationships that can have no determinative quality given their very basis and machinic production of history. A goal is by its nature predetermined, and this would defeat the notion of process, rhizomatic learning, and 'superlinearity'.

Moreover, for of all the concerns about 'who' learners are supposed to be or emulate in the target culture, the acknowledgement as to multiple viewpoints, struggles, class perspectives etc. would suggest that as intercultural communicators the learner's 'existential' goal is to be an intellectual, someone who is aware of these multiple viewpoints, target cultural issues and class/group perspectives and is able to articulate her own viewpoints as an intellectual of the target culture. This should not be thought of as an attempt to achieve elitist status, but as an attempt to turn not only language learning into the personally significant undertaking that it is, but to realize that in the world we live in that the cross-cultural communicator should be able to *aim to* transcend her centricity – without denying her humanity. In other words, while the need for histories requires affective and cultural experiences, these need to be supplemented by, and understood in light of, strategies involving meta-awareness of cultural issues.

In terms of the communicative goals of the L2 and C2 learner, these need to be stated in ways that many people might find wholly unsatisfying, and unscientific. That is, the goal of foreign language learning is to be *happy with the degree of ambiguity of one's situation*. Thus, if ambiguity is at such a level that it leads to anxiety, misunderstanding, confusion or unacceptably broken communication, then one has not reached a suitable goal for oneself. If one is content with the degree of communicative harmony, can express oneself in satisfying ways that do not result in accidentally negative situations, then one can think of oneself as cross-culturally competent. And when problems do arise, learners can apply their working (or work-in-progress) tools to try to resolve them.

In sum there are three themes or principles regarding learner and learning goals that can hold us in good stead:

1. Goals are neither linear targets nor final end points, but are ongoing processes
2. One cannot 'be like' or epistemologically imitate the cultural other, but learners
  - a) can choose which performative aspects and roles they will adopt and b) (as a result) will inevitably develop performative similarities

3. Because learners' goals are not and cannot be to have full understanding, then the *level* of competence and proficiency that learners have can be determined – by learners – as the degree of ambiguity and misunderstanding they experience during interaction. This is therefore a matter of personal evaluation.

### *Institutional Goals*

If institutional and instructional goals are different from learner goals it is because administrative logic comes into play. Administrators need to be able to show material evidence of completion and results of tasks so as to justify their worthiness both to higher governing bodies and to students themselves. For this reason administrative goals are closely aligned to assessment, and this will be discussed in section 8.4.

### **8.3.5    *Activities and Approaches that Maximize Autonomous Learning Opportunities***

We might here give brief consideration to the kinds activities learners can engage in that aim to satisfy requirements for autonomy within an institutional structure. Though there are many possibilities there are three broad types that merit discussion here because they can more immediately be seen to satisfy many of the principles outlined here.

#### *1. Projects*

Projects are *not* to be viewed as

“activities” often practiced as entertaining adjuncts to the purportedly serious business of grammar study and recitation. They are to be viewed as “activity” (in the singular), a determination to do something with a high degree of personal involvement, stemming from the perceived intrinsic merit of the project more than from the anticipated high marks to be awarded by a satisfied teacher (Barson 1997: 29).

Projects viewed in this light orient the learner to features and aspects of cultures, requiring research, analysis and longer-term investment than homework. Moreover, when learners can decide their area of interest and pursue them in a concerted effort, not only are they getting exposure to the topic through their research, but they are

highly likely to get exposure to topics and information that interests them through chance, thereby randomizing and personalizing their learning experience.

Viewed in this light, 'projects and the determination to accomplish them are in fact the core curriculum' (Barson 1997: 12), rather than just another thing to do to pass the course.

## *2. 'Productions'*

Linked to projects, though having sometimes a different focus, learners can be engaged in producing cultural versions and interpretations of general practices, such as newspapers, magazines or TV shows, or culturally 'specific' events, such as ceremonies and rites, or even more mundane daily activities. These all require extensive research and analysis of cultural norms, practices and standards in order to create authentic-like productions that refer to or reflect target cultural practices.

Further, productions such as envisaged here would likely demand group efforts, which, when well-managed and performed, increase opportunities for learners to learn from each other, permit the distribution of work load, while simultaneously providing various sources of information for each student.

## *3. Simulations*

While simulations are 'old hat' in the repertoire of communicative language teaching, chapter 7 showed that they are often linguistically focused and provide little analytic purchase as a result of their performance. Moreover, normal simulations are short-lived and aim to provide only practice of given pre-learned expressions or (less often) behaviors.

Another more meaningful simulation however, would be one which is created to endure beyond the ten-minute, time-filling exercise. It would be created to 'feed off itself' in that, as in the continuum of communication that is an aspect of daily life,

events and actions would have consequences that would generate further events and actions *ad infinitum* (theoretically speaking). This would represent a marked contrast to simulations that end when a particular practice exercise is completed. In self-generating simulations, relationships have time to develop, histories can accumulate, and meanings historically emerge in a rhizomatic fashion and are 'shared' through 'common' experience. Thus, instead of creating contexts or situations, simulations should create communities, (interest) groups, or even townships. Contexts could thus emerge from them, rather than be pre-ordained and thereby automatically falsified and unrealistic.

Projects, productions and simulations are examples of the kinds of approaches to learning and experiencing foreign realities that do not require major structural overhaul by institutions, and could quite quickly be adopted by them. Furthermore, they are widely applicable and suitable, since they do not impose methods, strictly speaking, and while certainly enhanced by technologies such as the Internet and computer software and audio-visual equipment, these are not vital components.

Properly devising and executing them would of course take some effort, though maintaining them would largely rest in the students' hands. First, such approaches would need to be carefully designed according to a principled framework that ensures such prerequisites as analysis, personalization, expression and randomization. Second, teachers would need to be trained, if not in designing them, then in setting them up, in explaining guidelines, research and analytical methods and concepts. Finally, learners themselves would need to be trained, so that they could undertake or perform and equally importantly continue their work.

Another final benefit of approaches such as this is that students' works and materials could be archived and serve ongoing generations of learners both in terms of information and as examples. Materials would thus become widely available, especially if shared in a database available to institutions, thus mitigating the need to

purchase textbooks, and could serve as strong foundation for long term implementation and practice.

#### **8.4 Testing Cultural Competence**

Of all areas in FLT that are trying to change toward acknowledging communicative and cultural performance as part of overall communicative ability, the area of assessment has been slowest. No matter how innovative mainstream methods and approaches have tried to be, when it comes to testing learners in an official capacity the design of tests inevitably defers to the linguistic model as an indication of language ability:

Perhaps the best-known and most painful example of the failure to implement holistic change in second language education is that in many cases while teaching methodology has become more communicative, testing remains with the traditional paradigm, consisting of discrete items, lower-order thinking and a focus on form rather than meaning. This creates a backwash effect that tends to pull teaching back toward the traditional paradigm, even when teachers and others are striving to go toward the new paradigm (Jacobs and Farrell 2001: 13)

Jacob and Farrell's comments will sound familiar to most instructors, who despite their best efforts to introduce a variety of experiences and approaches to their learners, will feel significant pressure to yield to the drill method of instruction in the final weeks of a course since they a) know what will be in the exam b) that the exam will assess more or less language form and c) that they must therefore ensure that the exam's contents are 'covered' so as to prevent accusations (from above and below) of having deviated from the course. Indeed, it would come as no surprise to learn that both instructors and learners are frustrated in their efforts because in the end these efforts must defer to The Test.

This should not and need not be the case. While it is true that even learners will want to be officially<sup>7</sup> assessed at some stage of their learning, there is no reason to believe that assessment in the form of a two- or three-hour exam is the only way to gauge a learner's ability. It is only, as usual, in the interests of administrative convenience and homogenization (and the now legitimized and all-powerful testing systems such as IELTS and Cambridge) that discrete-item paper tests serve a practical purpose.

If learners are to have the opportunity to negotiate course structure and content, then it follows that assessment can also be negotiated both in terms of objectives, that is, where learners are evaluated against the goals they have set themselves, and their 'ability'. After all, success is 'relative not absolute' (James 1983: 17), especially when one considers the heterogeneity of learners, the variety of their learning strategies and rates, as well as of course the multiplicity of communicative strategies and meanings.

When assessment is removed as an administrative imperative, and in turn as a legitimized (range of) way(s) of gauging learners' 'true' worth, and the interests of learners are genuinely centralized in LL courses, then 'success' and 'completion' of study can be gauged by learners, who can decide if and when have managed to attain a level of cross-cultural competence when 'they have acquired enough of it to satisfy their needs' (Hughes 1983: 4). This is not to say that assessment is to be left entirely in the student's hands. After all, it would be impossible for them to determine whether they have satisfied their needs, or to do any kind of honest self-evaluation, if it were not for a significant (indeed, greater) amount feedback, both direct, in the form of comments and discussions, even quizzes and tests, and indirect, as when they gauge their performance in genuine communicative interactions. But the point is that in most cases the anonymous authority of the Test Result should not serve as the final unquestioned indicator of any learner's communicative ability.

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<sup>7</sup> It should be clear that other forms of evaluation – such as immediate feedback – are in principle more valued here. The discussion of 'official' assessment is therefore used to indicate typically administrative forms: exam papers, marks, grades and so on.

Testing therefore should be seen as an extension of feedback, not a measure of worth. In this way the meaning and importance of a test changes from that of being a ceremonious 'closing' of the learning process (symbolically and literally as when a course finishes) and instead, by not being tied to a final outcome (awarding degree, diploma etc) open the way to further cross-cultural exploration. Rather than score and mark therefore, results can be summarized in terms of learner weaknesses and strengths. Instead of testing what has been taught – the traditional procedure which relies on linear teach-memorize-test conceptions of teaching and learning – tests should actually randomize either the items which have been assembled during the course or present something entirely unknown. The challenge involved in this is precisely what is needed to gauge one's ability to face the unknown, to strategize, to infer, and to move across contexts and discourses. That is, such a test would not aim to examine what a learner *ought* to know because it was taught in class, but what they *need* to know because it is a part of a linguistic, communicative or cultural need they may one day face.

This is another reason project-based courses have been suggested as playing a central role in the framework developed, since projects require a different form of assessment than tests. Projects need to be assessed and negotiated individually, and teachers must become acquainted with each learner's (or pair's etc.) project and decide/negotiate with learner(s) how they will be assessed, according to the criteria their successful completion implies. Learners who have assumed and accepted the responsibility for directing their studies should have no difficulty in evaluating the quality of their work. Could a course not be completed therefore, by a learner who sets her own goals and then defends/justifies her efforts in an end-of-course interview with the instructor?

In sum, examinations and assessment are highly problematic areas for language instruction and course design. Indeed, they evoke many of the most difficult epistemological questions, and reliability and validity are issues constantly in the background: how does a test writer know that what s/he sets on an exam actually does



test the skill in question? How do we know that test questions are ever clear and transparent enough to be understood? Can we indeed make them obvious? What areas of knowledge are used to construct tests and do they match the same areas of knowledge that learners are being asked to use? These questions seem rarely to be asked by those empowered to set and write tests. Many of the problems however are self-inflicted by the administrative machinery and pedagogical ideology that demands homogeneity and epistemological uniformity of learners (and teachers). In an ideal course however, in a framework designed to cater to the learner before the institution, assessment need not be used to order, striate and hierarchize knowledge. Instead, it is entirely feasible that with major re-conceptualization and subsequent restructuring of the purpose of examination and assessment that it can more honestly *serve* the learner as another learning 'tool', rather than simply punctuate their learning process, by supposedly making a determination of – but also determining – his or her state of cross-cultural communicative ability.

### **8.5 Technology**

So enthusiastic, rapid and pervasive has been the introduction of recent technology in FLT that this thesis may well have focused on the uses and possibilities of technology – in particular computer and digital technology, to provide access to other cultures in various ways. This is because the relatively new field of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and the use of the internet both in research and in on-line learning has greatly improved the possibilities of self-directed and distance learning, gaining access to cultural materials and authentic language, providing off-site access to instructional material and even randomizing learning and instruction. Indeed, many aspects of CALL conform to many of the principles of this thesis. Time and space *is* created by the opportunity to learn where and when and how one chooses, as well as by enabling cheap real-time or delayed communication around the world.

Education has and will continue to change with the increasing use of computer technology, and the increasing development of software and hardware, computer programs, learning packages and so on. It is thus not only the potential, but the

inevitability of technological application in FLT that makes its inclusion in any framework a requirement, and in this section brief consideration will be given to issues and examples of CALL.

### **8.5.1 Issues Regarding and Examples of CALL**

Perhaps the most primary concern regarding CALL is that technology should not be adopted only because it is fashionable or marketable, but because it offers genuine improvement in the way foreign languages and cultures can be accessed, presented, and delivered. If software is designed that does no more than present texts and provide instruction, then computers are only expensive replacements for textbooks.

The potential of computers and computer software can be found in a number of areas however. Considerable excitement has been generated by the possible use of networks and the internet for real-time (e.g. chat) or delayed (e.g. E-mail) communicative purposes. Donaldson and Kötter, for example, examine the use of MOO (Multiple-User Domain, Object Oriented), which they describe as a 'text-based virtual reality environment' (Donaldson and Kötter 1999: 532). Much like a chat program, it is set up by groups of learners who are studying each other's languages (i.e. English speaking learners of German communicate with learners of German speaking learners of English). Donaldson and Kötter argue that this activity is principled on learner autonomy and tandem learning: MOO allows learners 'to set their own goals and to make informed decisions about how to achieve those goals' (Donaldson and Kötter 1999: 536). Thorne (2002: 40) also suggests that the use of networks and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in general forges 'hybridity that allows for an interplay between students' non-academic identities and the discursively constructed institutional roles of the classroom'.

The capability of providing immediate and specific feedback is another promise of digital technology. Exercises can be written which provide explanations for one's mistakes, or texts can be hyperlinked to explanatory pages which not only give structural clarification, but referential and cultural ones also. This principle can be

extended to multimedia programs which play audio-videos, have tape scripts where words or phrases can be highlighted and played individually, where the sound passage can be manipulated by speeding up or slowing down, and generally where there are multiple and personalizable approaches to given texts and presentations (Lian 2000; Lian and Lian 1997).

Of course the internet gives access to a vast amount of information, whether it is instructional or trivial. While learners may well be guided in their use the internet (such as to specific sites), one prospect is that it permits the individualization as well as randomization of learners' studies. Randomization need not be confined to internet research however. Spiro et al (1999) have published influential papers concerning Random Access Instruction, which is based on constructivist and 'cognitive flexibility' theories (and has also been considered as an example of rhizomatic learning for example by Pencheva and Shopov 1999), and have examined the use of hypertexts as means for (in their case advanced) learners to analyze films and other texts.

With similar theories and principles, Furstenberg et al. (2001) have presented the results of *The Cultura Project*, in which learners from different cultures have been given the responsibility to create their own 'book' or materials of the target culture in an on-going project. Using an array of strategies such as questionnaires, opinion polls, the juxtaposition of materials and a virtual environment,

Cultura offers a comparative approach that asks learners to observe, to compare and to analyse parallel materials from their respective cultures. These initial observations serve as a starting point for attempting to decipher the meaning behind the differences revealed. (Furstenberg et al. 2001: 3)

As mentioned above, computers and technology can create time and space in the sense that learners need not be constricted to classes for their guidance or information. It is not only in terms of individual work, however (which could at any rate be done with books for example) that digital technology extends a learner's contact with the target language (in a communicative and sociocultural context), but in *virtual*

dimensions. Consider the notion of cyberspace for example, in which people meet, communicate and interact in synchronous or asynchronous environments according to their tastes or desires. Digital technology can thus be used to create virtual social spaces, which can take the form of realistic or simulated and role-play based interactions.

At the same time this virtual world does present some concerns. Beckett for example makes the salient observation that recent emphasis in pedagogical philosophy on embodied states (gender, culture, class) has coincided with the introduction of technology-based flexible learning and 'delivery' which 'writes the body out of the learning equation' (1998: n/p). And Thorne (2002) points out that although E-mail and chat programs make communication between members of various cultures possible, this does not necessarily mean that learners actually develop deeper understandings of cultures. He points out that not only might learners not be utilizing the networks in order to learn from each other, but because various cultures and social groups understand networking to have different purposes, and use computers as mediating tools in different ways, that learners may well be using them in manners that are quite contrasting and therefore misunderstood.

In sum, digital technology and networks can – and should – constitute significant elements of any model of language and culture learning. Technology can satisfy the requirements of the principles that have been formulated in many ways, and currently it seems the possibilities for the use of software are limited only by the imagination. Concurrently however, though its acceptance is justified, the implementation of technology must be well-considered and balanced with other means and strategies.

### **8.6 Summary: A 'Postmodern' Language Course**

In this chapter an attempt has been made to provide a general framework that can be used in devising an institutional language course. The lack of a specific and prescriptive syllabus or of even more specific activities and tasks (beyond the examples in section 8.3) is explained by the emphasis on localization and

personalization, so that any concrete instructions for a course would be contradictory and difficult to justify.

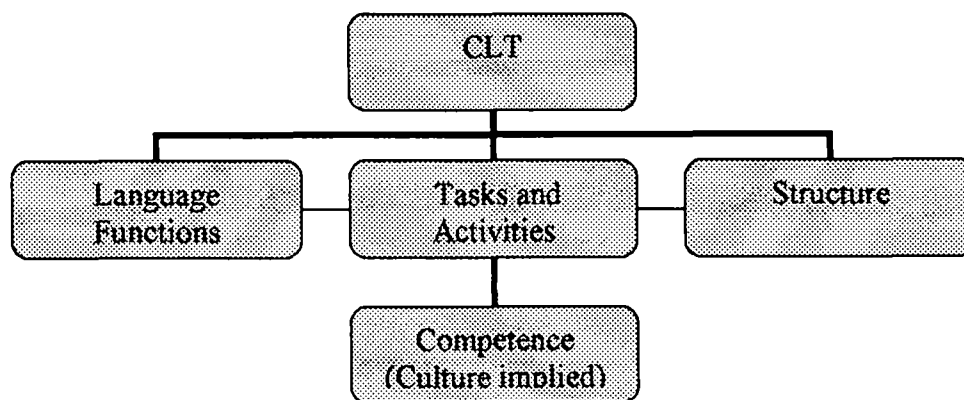
One implication that has emerged from the principles that have been formulated in previous chapters is that what is called for is to all intents and purposes a 'paradigm shift' in foreign language and culture teaching. Where in chapter 3 it was shown how Byram (1991) for example offers a guideline for the gradual and incremental introduction of the cultural component in a foreign language course that spans three years, the basic conservatism and conceptualization of the language learning problem prevails. Despite his consistent argument that culture and language are inseparable, he feels it necessary to treat them differently, with language predictably taking precedence. While *one* way to examine language is of course by considering it structurally, the main problem with this format or strategy is that if 'language' is presented prior to 'culture' then clearly no significant change in the way the two are objectified, hypostatized and legitimized can occur: the goal of 'language teaching' is 'language learning' and this can be achieved linearly, piece by piece and with increasing 'complexity', with each of these objects and processes are all defined by experts.

In this chapter a different model has appeared. Instead of the linear and componential conception of the presentation of the foreign language, the analysis of communicative performances and cultural practices aims more to conflate the traditionally separated and one-sided examination of, linguistic and cultural aspects. This means that a foreign 'language' course has to be more intensive and cover more ground. It has to be critically, conceptually and intellectually engaged, textually rich and methodologically varied. Content should often be under-determined in the sense that it should not be chosen in a syllabus but allowed to take random turns: learners should be able to create content, not just homework. Of course, such a course asks that learners self-direct their non-contact time. It also challenges them to undertake, if not a greater variety of tasks, then certainly a deeper approach to them. Because learning has to be guided as well as given the possibility to be random and individualized,

conditions need to be fostered in which learner-freedom is ensured by the acceptance of the unpredictable, the tangential, the personal.

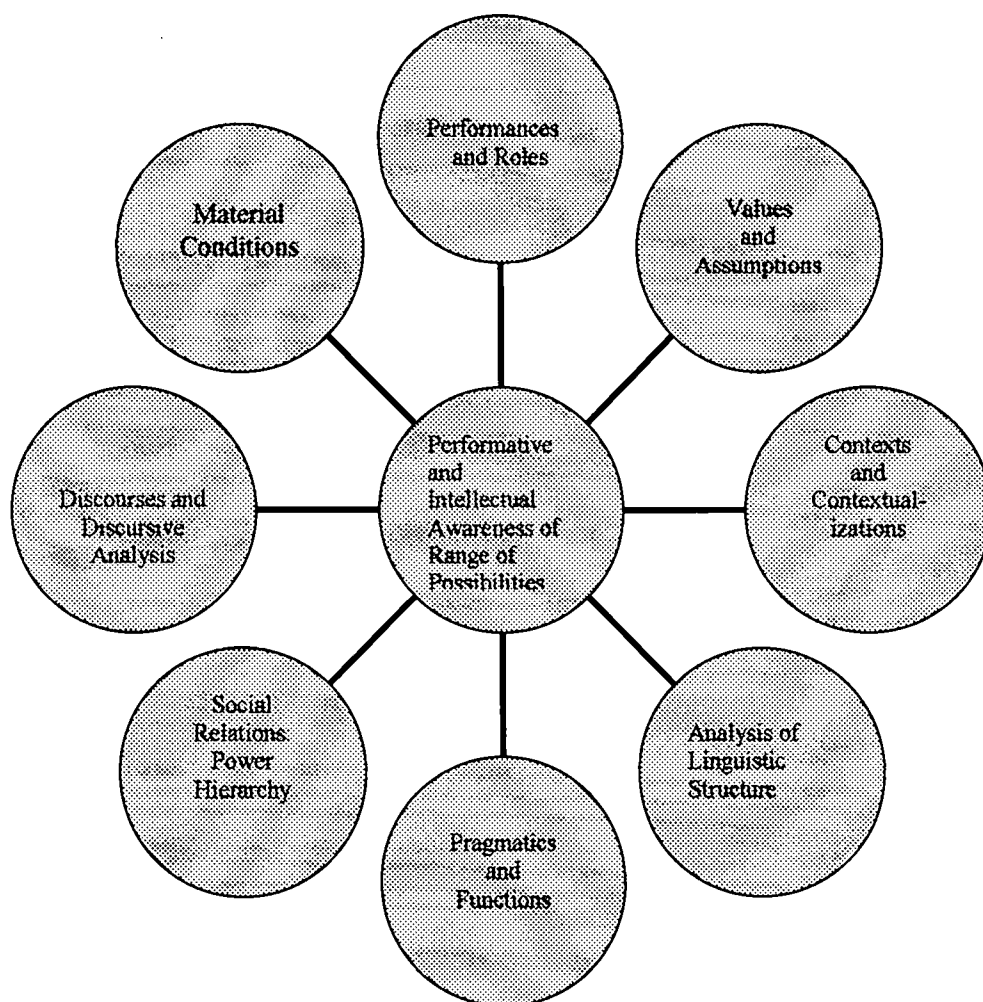
Teachers and institutions need not pre-empt all needs, nor assume that what is perceived as being the same needs can be solved in a single way. Rather, explanation and teaching should meet the needs of learners when they appear, and feedback should be used as a central pedagogical process, instead of an evaluative one. This is because the aim of foreign language learning – that is the ethical, honest aim – is not conformity with academic goals, but to contrast one's realities, perspectives and meanings, in other words one's socially produced and reinforced habitus, with that of different realities etc. which need also to be seen as an ongoing production of different cultural and social histories. As such the ultimate goal of CIFLL is that teaching must be coordinated with learners' goals, which learners are encouraged to recognize and determine.

Another fundamental difference between the CLT model and the framework outlined here is that while CLT continues to serve the notion of competence that defers to linguistic conceptualizations, the culturally focused model is multidisciplinary and eclectic. This difference might be depicted in the following ways:



*Figure 8.1 CLT Model of Competence*

This contrasts with a model that emphasizes and starts with a cultural background:



*Figure 8.2 The Cultural and Multidisciplinary Model*

Of course, this depiction represents only what might be termed the content focus of a model. A more thorough illustration would need to be three dimensional, adding learning theories, as well as ethical considerations, and would permit categories that are unknown, open-ended, unpredictable and, in sum, rhizomatic.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusion: Principles and Frameworks**

#### **9.1 Summary of Themes, Issues and Principles**

This thesis has endeavored to create a holistic framework for foreign language pedagogy with an emphasis on what it argues to be three central and interrelated areas: (the ontology of) culture, learning and epistemology, and ethical education. It has done so with a loosely postmodern, essentially experimental and openly eclectic perspective that acknowledges the role of ambiguity, free play of meaning, randomization, the subjectivity of reality and its categorization, and arbitrariness. Due to this, and despite its ambitiousness, the conceptual development of a coherent, 'all-inclusive' culture-centered framework for foreign language pedagogy neither can nor should not be considered as ever being completed, definitive or final. Instead it is hoped that the role this thesis has played is not in providing 'knowledge', but in initiating a more adventurous and philosophically grounded approach. It is also hoped that it has deepened, if not initiated a refreshing dialogue to the fields of SLA and FLT.

In attempting to conceptualize a thematic approach to CIFLL, and number of major themes, issues and principles were presented, each of which might further be considered and researched.



### **9.1.1 Themes**

Though a number of separate themes emerged in this thesis, it is important to be aware that they are interrelated, that they imply each other, and therefore that they must be considered as pivotal in the further development of any pedagogical framework. A list of the most important themes includes:

#### *Cultural and Discursive Embeddedness*

Of course the underlying theme has been that humans are social actors and that their actions, performances, and communicative strategies are framed by sanctioned and constructed discourses, fields, constraints, all of which are informed by various cultural systems. Actors develop habitus and a logic of practice(s) which delimit the range of possibilities of action and agency, meaning and ways of formulating, discussing, and understanding social realities. This range of possibilities is guided by both the material and ideological conditions of our lives and actions within a multitude, but by no means infinity, of contexts and fields.

#### *Individuality of Learning and 'Coming-to-Understand'*

Though actors are social 'constructs' and though many prominent learning theories emphasize the dialogicality and need for other actors for learning, this does not contradict the fundamental and necessary individuality of learning. That is, while learning is facilitated and directed by social experience, one's unique history and perspective ensures that there is no way to pre-empt *how* meanings and understandings evolve in the individual. There is no direct and transparent link between an object and one's perception or interpretation of it and therefore one cannot make the assumption that what is taught is exactly what is learned. That is, though mediation – whether by others, by one's own perceptions, or by concepts – is a crucial aspect of learning, these mediators in themselves do not carry mirror images or truths of any object.

#### *Learner-focused versus Administration-driven*

It was shown that there are at least two conflicting interests in educational institutions. One serves the ideal of education (even if this is a politicized,

### *Conclusion: Principles and Frameworks*

historicized and cultural ideal) and thus places the learning process at the centre of its objective. The other interest is the administrative which (for various reasons) is more focused on management and organization. Where practitioners upholding the education-ideal are *more* (not completely) inclined to experiment, more ready to accept new approaches, more willing to consider change, the administrative, striating force mobilizes disciplinary and controlling mechanisms so as to impose and maintain its version of order.

### *Ambiguity*

One significant deviation from traditional conceptualizations of language and meaning as presented in FL classrooms is a conviction that unpredictability, spontaneity and 'rhizomatization' are integral and vital forces in the language and culture learning process. Whereas language instruction has done much to undermine or ignore this fact, it is argued that it should not only be accepted, but harnessed.

Commensurately, meaning and interpretation is not fixed. The arbitrariness of the sign, as well as its 'trace' ensures that meaning does not remain stable from one usage to the next. While this feature should not be exaggerated or taken to suggest that the transfer of meaning in communication is impossible, it is a feature of semiosis that should be borne in mind, and used to ward off assumptions that learners have to 'get' everything in the same way as the idealized native.

### *Contextualization*

While there is no such thing as pure meaning, generally uncontrollable, social and functional meanings are created dialogically and in context. That is, context provides the semantic and performative anchor and guideline in interactions. Context however, needs to be understood as embodying a greater range of variables than linguistic. In addition to the words of a text, and *with* the addition of the argument that context is a historical and political achievement, Hymes' model of SPEAKING for example is much more fitting of the notion of context than that which is often considered as filling in the semantic gap for learners.

*Randomization*

In light of the positions summarized above, an additional supporting theme is that of randomization, where learning is facilitated by chance encounters of various contexts, discourses, texts, events, references and so on. However, rather than assume this to mean that learners should be left on their own to spontaneously choose their content, the idea of randomization is better understood as that of forming an individualized, historicized network of experiences. That is, learners can *follow up* on interesting topics, themes etc. that emerge out of ones they are already considering, rather than stopping short the potential proliferation of meanings a line of study facilitates. For this reason the metaphor and concept of the rhizome was introduced, which describes a networked root system in which nodes spring up at random intervals, though each is connected to all others.

*Multidisciplinarity*

This thesis has demonstrated that the types of discussions and problems that other disciplines such as social theory and anthropology (and philosophy, neuroscience and psychology etc.), and theoretical perspectives such as postmodernism, deal with are not only applicable but also relevant to language teaching discourses. When these 'foreign' frameworks are applied moreover, they suggest sometimes fundamental or radical changes and re-conceptualizations of the field of FLT. As such, in order to keep the field vital and active and constantly aware of its limitations and conservatism, multidisciplinary perspectives, problematics and paradigms are absolutely necessary. They should not be relegated to the fringes of SLA or FLT, or seen as tolerated supplements undertaken by the eccentrics of the field, but should indeed become pivotal and core interests that are required reading for anyone to have a varied and open-minded background to the problem of learning foreign languages and cultural structures. What is clear is that one cannot approach or understand culture, the cultural production of ideals, values or behaviors, semiosis, the formation of habitus using one cure-all method or conceptual terminology, and the adoption of varied perspectives may assist in avoiding this.

### **9.1.2 Issues**

Most of the issues that have surfaced in this thesis raise concerns regarding the practicality and applicability of implementing the framework outlined. For this reason the intended audience has been operationally limited to tertiary institutions, rather than secondary schools or private academies, since it has been argued that any acceptance of the CIFLL framework developed here would more likely occur first at (bold) universities. Nonetheless, a number of issues even at this level must be kept in mind.

First, it is important to accept that any change in the way FLT is approached and managed requires change and change in those who comprise the field. Thus, administrators, teachers and teacher-trainers and students would need to be involved in discussing the need for a conceptual and methodological overhaul, and then become committed to it. They would need training and confidence regarding their ability to handle any new demands. This involves time, money, energy and patience.

Also among the many issues discussed or implied, one of the most salient ones refers to teaching as an authoritative practice that legitimizes its own role by defining and categorizing the object of knowledge it teaches. This presents a number of questions. For example, to what degree is it necessary for the institution to govern the learning patterns of learners in order for it to continue to be considered a legitimate site and service for teaching languages? What other means of presenting or experiencing a foreign language and culture are denied by institutional practices? Does the learning of another language really require grades and assessment (beyond that of feedback)? Can one quantitatively determine another person's 'understanding'? To what degree is the institute capable of facilitating or 'fast-tracking' communicative ability, when the learning community is insulated from the broader communicative and cultural world it represents? To frame it in another way, how much *can* and *should* we expect the class to simulate the 'real world'?

### **9.1.3 Principles**

The main sets of principles of this thesis, the formulation of which formed the bulk of the effort and its objective, were presented in chapters 4 to 6 and do not need to be repeated here. However, it is possible for summarizing purposes to reduce them into foundational statements:

1. The principle of openness: by openness is meant that FLT and SLA take into account the ontological complexity of culture and meaning. Rather than reducing its object CIFLL needs to be open to theories, perspectives, approaches, variables and the indefinable.
2. The principle of the (social) individual: despite the social construction of the individual, the individual has a unique history and perspective, and this is reflected in the learning process.
3. The principles of modesty: the modesty principle needs to be adopted so as to make pedagogues accept that they do not, nor will not have all the answers to CIFLL (an effect of the first two principles). It also condenses into a maxim that should serve practitioners: be aware of the assumptions you make<sup>1</sup>.

## **9.2 Limitations and Anticipated Criticisms**

One might consider the potential limitations and criticisms of this thesis in theoretical terms, as well as in terms of the day-to-day practice of institutionalized FLL.

### **9.2.1 Theoretical Limitations**

Perhaps the most obvious limitation to this study, if it has succeeded in its attempt to provide a broad, theoretically grounded picture of the conceptual problems the study of culture evokes, is that it has not offered more specific and local empirical data. Although no attempt to provide an atomistic thesis which adds another piece

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Ania Lian (personal communication) for introducing a similar version of this maxim. Her version is 'make no assumptions'.

to the SLA or FLT 'puzzle' was made, since one of the major premises and reasons for this thesis is that there is something fundamentally flawed with the puzzle itself, it is important for future studies and research to undertake quantitative and qualitative testing and rigorous experimental analysis. That might of course sound ironic in light of many of the postmodern flavored statements made relating to the establishment, use and legitimization of objective knowledge in SLA research and pedagogical discourse. However, the arguments found here have not dismissed these discursive practices outright, but aimed to generate a more reflexive practice in 'young' field of CIFLL.

The fact that the three main issues of ontology, epistemology and ethics are immense topics and quite easily could be the themes of theses in their own right, means that in some ways only the surface of the problem has been scratched. Indeed, perhaps this can only ever be the case, and it is hoped that the aim to develop a coherent and justified range of theoretical positions that span three major questions has been worth the effort.

Some of the limitations of this thesis are related to the fundamental questions and limitations to the language teaching enterprise. That is, is it really possible to present any form or version of language to a learner? Is not *any* theoretical approach limiting and reductive? When programs and courses advertise both 'communicative' and 'efficient' syllabuses, confusion can arise as to the meaning of these terms. If it is communicative, why do many of the tasks involve learners in making language rather than saying something? What does efficiency have to do with learning? Does it mean 'better' or faster learning?

This thesis has been written very much more in the vein of hoping to initiate or enter into the beginnings of a new discourse regarding SLA and FLL. It is hoped therefore that it has advanced the field by introducing new things to talk about, and to consider, rather than providing concrete information derived from standard practices.

### **9.2.2 Practical Limitations**

It is foreseeable that because this thesis has aimed to formulate a model with ideal conditions in mind that gritty reality would present a number of practical obstacles. Despite the increasing assurance in the language profession that culture ought to play a vital role in the study of language, many learners do not share the same beliefs. For many, the prevailing wish is still to learn the 'language' as a separate entity, with culture being of little interest or concern – even if language learning per se is often not considered to be a worthwhile undertaking (Byram and Fleming 1998). Indeed, as Bentahila and Davies (1989: 107) write, foreign language pedagogy should not hold to the assumption that learners are studying the target language even to interact with foreigners.

One might argue that language teaching is largely culpable for both states of affairs, having entrenched the objectified (and often boring!) notion of language as words and grammar in its classes. Yet paradoxically, countless learners continue to complain that after many years of formal study they still can't respond to simple interactions let alone follow or join a normal conversation. Thus, if language and culture teaching is to succeed in establishing a new framework and approach it must do so by convincing learners that when they are not asked to rote learn or remember an aspect of language, they are still doing something 'worthwhile' rather than simply something to relieve that ardor of serious work. Attitudes to learning as well as to (often stereotyped target) cultures have in these cases to be changed, as much as they were formed.

Although the embodied and physical aspects of socialization were touched upon, there was little mention of how the physicality of performance might be developed in addition to the semantic and semiotic aspects. In particular, the case of pronunciation was not explored and it is clear that an understanding of culture may possibly never help a student learn how to, say, trill their 'r's in French. This can be related to other 'skills', such as reading different scripts. In short, cultural analysis

will not necessarily provide a holistic solution to all language learning needs. But no claim to that effect has been made

The more radical any new approach or theoretical position might appear, the more likely it is to be criticized, rejected and denounced. FLT and ELT are well-established and indeed influential fields (given the legitimacy such certifications as TOEFL and IELTS wield), the foundational assumptions which have matured over time and become entrenched in (the logic of) its practices. Thus, if this thesis is seen as making proposals that would demand a change of the basic status quo, then it is unlikely to gain acceptance. But this can serve as no argument against the *need* to undertake such broad and (to some) simultaneously radical tasks as this thesis represents. At the same time, it is not practically possible to stop everything that is being done and start over, even if many of the arguments are accepted, change would not be universal and sweeping, but gradual and incremental.

Related to the question of making changes is the question of cost. Whether in terms of materials or training or technology, it is unlikely that economic concerns would be waived and one must consider what outlay might be involved in creating the conditions outlined, and whether it was 'worth' it.

### **9.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

Given the number of questions this thesis has raised, there is no shortage of the possible number of directions that further research could take. First, issues and research could be undertaken at the theoretical level regarding each of the main topics that were integrated here. Some notable areas of research would be comparative cultural analyses for (and by) CIFLL learners, since there is a continuing lack of more specific and localized comparative information. In this vein research could be conducted by ethnographers as well as by learners as ethnographers. Given that hands-on cultural research is not always possible,



### *Conclusion: Principles and Frameworks*

investigations regarding the viability of the internet or other communications system as a research tools would certainly be interesting.

With regard to learners, the biggest problem that has been envisaged has been that of the imposition of autonomy. As such, it is necessary to conduct research in various cultures as to the effects, variations, interpretations and general viability of autonomous learning. Along with this the notion and creation of rhizomatic learning conditions needs to be explored

In terms of reflexive analysis in the CIFLL field, one of the most interesting areas of research would be to analyze the discursive construction of FLT and how it legitimizes its objects. In addition to this, since one claim has been that institutionalized FLT tends to discursively construct learners as inferiors and incompetents, it would be valuable to do confirmative analysis of this both in classrooms (perhaps action research, conversation analysis or discourse analysis) and of textbooks and materials.

At the level of praxis research the most urgent and obvious work that needs to be completed is to conduct a longitudinal study of a course designed according to the principles and suggestions set out in this thesis. Of particular interest here would be student and teacher responses as to the value of the course in terms of fostering performative as well as informed cross-cultural competence. As an experimental program it would also be fascinating to discover how difficult it is to establish and present such a program, both in terms of its practicality and in terms of emphasizing learner research using conceptual tools and frameworks. Other questions to be answered would include the duration of such programs, the age and entry-level of learners, the feasibility of including them in standard institutional degrees or courses, and the success of negotiated assessment. In short because this thesis has remained at the theoretical level, the next step would be to get empirical confirmation (or otherwise) of the hypothesis and framework herein developed.

#### **9.4 Concluding Remarks**

This thesis began with the premise and argument that foreign language instruction should attempt to transcend its linguistic bias and that culture should become more central to the foreign language teaching stage. This is not because linguistics does not offer informative or helpful knowledge of language, but because it offers a perspective on communication that may well be reductive for language learners. It seems no matter how hard the field of FLT tries to introduce new frameworks that ultimately it becomes concerned with ('comprehensible') input and output, with words and language-as-code, and with the facts of language.

But if one can accept that the revised goal of CIFLL is 'understanding', and that this means engaging in a new epistemology, then one also realizes that the problem of language learning can be considered to be one of the most fascinating philosophical problems one could hope to address. Indeed, if the FLT field did come to perceive how truly profound its task is, then it would be making a giant leap.

It is hoped that this thesis has been able to contribute to the resolve to make such a leap.

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