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Teaching and Learning in  
the Language Classroom

# PART ONE

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## A framework for teaching and learning

# 1

## LEARNERS AND LEARNING, CLASSROOMS AND CONTEXTS

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*'Another language is another soul.'*

CHARLES V

- 1 What do we know about how languages are learned?
- 2 How do differences among learners affect learning processes and teaching procedures?
- 3 What motivations do learners have for learning English?
- 4 What factors of context should teachers take into account?
- 5 What roles can learners and teachers play in the language learning process?
- 6 What roles can learning materials play in the classroom?

### *Introductory task*

Consider this account of a particular teaching situation, given by Rufino, a Spanish secondary-school teacher of English.

- 1 What are the factors which help Rufino in his work? Think of:
  - (a) social factors
  - (b) educational factors
  - (c) pupil factors
  - (d) teacher factors.
- 2 What are the specific contextual factors which affect your own work as a teacher?

My name's Rufino and I teach English in secondary school in Spain. My students are mostly the 13 to 14 age range. English language learning begins at the age of 8 here so my classes have been studying English for six years. I work in a small town in the north of Spain. There is a strong awareness of language in this region of Spain as we have two languages in the community here, Spanish and Basque. English is the third language we learn and it's a foreign language. There is very

little exposure to English in society here. Even Sky News on the TV is dubbed.

English is an obligatory part of the school curriculum, but the fact that it is a compulsory subject for all students does not pose a problem as most pupils are highly motivated and parental attitudes are positive and supportive. In fact, learning English is part of a personal agenda for most people as it enables us to move around in the European community. It isn't difficult to see real reasons for learning English for jobs or studies, or for travelling.

There are twenty-five pupils in each of my classes, which is fine. It isn't too many to prevent me from keeping a sense of them as individuals, each with their own strengths and weaknesses and needs. Each class has a total of three hours a week of English. Teachers have a good deal of flexibility in deciding how to use these hours as long as we keep to the curriculum objectives set out by the educational authorities. The national curriculum is fairly new and in our school we have teams of teachers working on an interpretation of the objectives set out for each year of schooling. Our task is to translate the objectives into courses, using a mixture of bought-in textbooks and our own materials, especially for project work, which has become very popular. I've been glad to see project work introduced as I believe we need to focus on using English in the classroom for purposes that are as real as possible. I also like being able to set up a project and then standing back a little while my pupils organize themselves in collaborative work. It's part of learner-centred teaching for me with this age group as I believe they really need to develop skills of organization and working together. Schools work out their own guidelines for assessment and we set our own tests within the English curriculum, but if students want to go on to the university they must take a public entrance examination. My colleagues and I are learning a lot as we put our policies together and design our courses.

As for resources, well, I suppose teachers themselves are a major resource. We do a pre-service course at university, either a three- or four-year course, so we are trained and qualified teachers. There are also some opportunities for in-service training, for example, in seminars organized by local teachers' centres, or by British publishers, or sometimes by professional organizations like TESOL. However, these are all voluntary and sometimes they are expensive and travelling is involved. We are well-resourced in schools. I have a blackboard, an overhead projector, a cassette player, and a video in my classroom, and there is a self-access centre in the school. This isn't so common in schools but depends on the enthusiasm of teachers as it takes time and energy to set up a centre and to encourage pupils to use it. Personally I've put a lot of my own

efforts into developing these kinds of resources because I think the age group I teach benefits tremendously from opportunities for organizing their own learning.

## 1.1 Introduction: issues for the language teacher

In this first chapter, the issues we look at are those which are fundamental to ELT professional practice. They are reflected in the account which Rufino gives of his teaching situation. He describes the context in which his learners study English and highlights some of the social, educational, and local factors which may advantage or disadvantage the pupils in his classes and himself as teacher: on the one hand, strong language awareness and positive attitudes to learning English in the community; on the other, lack of exposure to English.

This raises issues about the learning conditions in which his pupils study, and what is available to them and to him in terms of language input and language practice. Will there, for example, be authentic English language materials available from which listening or reading texts can be taken? In the project work he describes, will he be able to involve pupils in encounters with native speakers of English, or will they be text-based projects? Or can he set up correspondence projects with other schoolchildren in English-speaking countries?

Rufino is sensitive to his pupils as individual learners and realizes, for instance, that motivations and needs will vary as will strengths and weaknesses. In this, he reflects our professional concerns to find out how our learners differ from one another and to cater for this as much as possible.

In discussing the curriculum, Rufino comments on the role of materials in language teaching and the balance his school is trying to create between commercial materials and teacher-made materials in fulfilling curriculum objectives. And implicit in his mention of project work and self-access resources are issues concerning the relative roles of teachers and learners and where the balance of responsibility lies for a successful learning process.

In outlining these issues, he communicates a sense of awareness that language teaching is a complex endeavour, requiring a professional approach which involves decision-making at a variety of levels. The teachers in his school are not merely agents in an educational hierarchy, applying specified methods, but have the creative responsibility of building links between externally imposed curriculum objectives and their own course planning, activity design, materials development, and management of learning procedures. They are involved in a process of continuing professional self-development.

There is also implicit in what Rufino says a framework of principles upon which he bases his classroom practice. And these principles are underpinned by the views he holds of learners, learning, and language use, and are informed by his analysis of the teaching situation. If we were to abstract some of these principles from his account and present them as a teacher's credo, it might look something like this:

- In the classroom I want to focus on using English for purposes that are as real as possible.
- I need to keep a sense of pupils as individuals and to respond to the different needs they have as much as I can.
- I believe that secondary-school pupils benefit greatly from opportunities to take on more responsibility for their own learning.

The rest of this chapter will consider the insights available to teachers from the evaluation of practice, from research studies, and from theory-building in the various disciplines of applied linguistics and education which can help us to understand the issues raised by Rufino's reflections and which can inform our own decision-making.

## 1.2 What do we know about how languages are learned?

Any teacher seeking ideas about how languages are learned will find a surfeit of theories. However, some have proved more attractive to the ELT profession than others, probably because they concur in useful ways with ideas about the communicative classroom and can therefore be assimilated into current approaches. There are perhaps four areas of investigation and debate among second language acquisition researchers which deserve special attention from English language teachers: the nature of the input provided to learners; how learners process that input; the role of classroom interaction; and the role of error in language learning.

### 1.2.1 *The nature of input*

A significant idea that has emerged in recent years is that of *comprehensible input*. Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis posits that language is picked up, or *acquired*, when learners receive input from 'messages' which contain language a little above their existing understanding and from which they can infer meaning. The hypothesis makes a distinction between acquiring a language and learning it through conscious attention to language study. The acquisition process, often called a *creative construction process*, is parallel to that of a child learning its first language. A study of children's errors suggests

that they use *operating strategies*, such as paying attention to the ends of words, to formulate hypotheses about rules in the language, and that these hypotheses are tested out in their own attempts to produce language and gradually revised as they receive feedback on their attempts.

The classic example of the creative construction process is the series of stages that children go through in acquiring the rules for forming the past simple tense: first, they produce accurate irregular forms such as 'held' sporadically; then they produce an incorrect form 'holded' as they perceive a rule involving the /td/ sound at the end of words and overgeneralize the rule; finally they produce 'held' again as they refine the rule. Adults are thought to be capable of this same creative construction process, for which they need exposure to comprehensible input and feedback on their attempts to use newly acquired language.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) have suggested that once a language learner has formulated a hypothesis, it can be tested out in various ways. For example, one way would be to check it in a dictionary or grammar book, or with a teacher or native speaker. Another way to check it would be to wait for further examples in language input, to analyse these and compare them with the hypothesis. Alternatively, a learner could try out a language form in the classroom or in conversation and see what feedback is given about its correctness.

It is through the process of hypothesis making and testing that learners make sense of language input and impose a structure on it. They create a developing system known as *interlanguage*, which passes through a number of stages until it eventually approximates to the rules of the target language or until it stabilizes, or fossilizes, in ways that deviate from these rules.

The limitations of hypothesis testing and the creative construction process as a full explanation of second language acquisition have been much debated. There is a view, originating in Chomsky's seminal work in linguistics (1965), that there are universal language properties, i.e. a set of principles which apply to all languages, and that knowledge of these is inherent in the human mind. In other words, we are genetically pre-programmed for language learning and are constrained in the kinds of hypotheses we make.

This account tends to oversimplify a complex process. Second language researchers continue to debate the ways in which acquisition and learning relate to each other and the ways in which both might function in the language classroom. However, the notion of comprehensible input has been taken up with enthusiasm for a number of reasons.

- It confirms the need for meaningful input which will engage learners in working with language at a level which is slightly above their competence.

'Meaningful' has been variously interpreted by materials writers and teachers as 'relevant and topical to learners and their interests' or 'realistic' in terms of simulating the authentic texts and speaking situations learners may eventually have to handle. This implies a need for varied classroom materials, and many current coursebooks demonstrate a motivating range of situations and of texts, for example, newspaper articles, posters, advertisements, guides, maps, and invitations.

- It suggests the value of providing input through out-of-class resources such as readers and listening cassettes for self-access learning, or encouraging students to make use of whatever resources might be available in the community to increase input opportunities.
- It seems to confirm the usefulness of teachers adjusting their own classroom language, in line with students' proficiency, to simpler vocabulary and slower speech while retaining natural rhythm and intonation.

### 1.2.2 *The process of intake*

*Intake* refers to the ways in which learners process input and assimilate language to their interlanguage system. Learners will not process all the input available to them. Some of what they hear or read may not be understood, and some parts of input will receive more attention because, for various reasons, they seem more important or salient to the learner at a particular stage of development. The concept of intake has given us some insights into why teachers cannot control the learning process to the extent we might previously have believed. Take, for example, an initial class activity in which the teacher asks and invites questions about what students did the previous evening with the aim of practising the past simple tense. One student, thinking ahead to her turn, focuses on her need for the English word 'countryside' and uses the strategy of finding an alternative which is close to the meaning she wants to convey. She uses 'nature' and waits for the teacher's feedback. The simple past is not part of her agenda at that point and 'countryside' will probably be her intake. Hopefully, with further practice, she will eventually be able to retrieve this lexical item without hesitation.

It is clear that some kind of input is needed if language acquisition is to occur, but many questions remain about the kind of input which is most useful in facilitating the process. Does input need to be controlled in the traditional ways of the English language classroom? Why do learners notice some items more than others? Is it to do with such factors as frequency of input? Is input attended to more when it comes from the teacher as an authority figure rather than from other learners in the classroom? Does intake depend on how much work a learner has to do in comprehending or making sense of something? How do psychological factors of motivation and emotion affect the process of intake?



As yet we have an uncertain understanding of these issues. However, the answers are crucial to an effective teaching of the language system. For example, if it is the case that learners will assimilate those items on which they have to work harder to comprehend, there are implications here for the ways in which we teach new words. If learners attend to items which occur frequently in input, there are implications for the presentation of grammatical forms. If input receives more attention when it comes from the teacher, there are implications for classroom management. These issues will be revisited in later chapters.

### 1.2.3 *The role of interaction in the classroom*

Related to the notion of input is that of output. Learners need practice in producing *comprehensible output* (Swain 1985) using all the language resources they have already acquired. Getting feedback from the teacher and from other students in the class enables learners to test hypotheses and refine their developing knowledge of the language system. It has also been claimed that being pushed to produce output obliges learners to cope with their lack of language knowledge by struggling to make themselves understood, by speaking slowly for example, or repeating or clarifying their ideas through rephrasing. When a group of students do this while talking together, it is called *negotiation of meaning* and its aim is to make output more comprehensible. There is a principle underlying current ELT practice that interaction pushes learners to produce more accurate and appropriate language, which itself provides input for other students. This is one reason why pairwork and groupwork have become common features of contemporary classrooms.

A study by Pica and Doughty (1985) can be taken as an example of research looking at the role of groupwork in language learning. It investigated in what ways language input and output differed in a class using work in small groups and a class following a sequence of whole-class work fronted and controlled by the teacher. They studied three lower-intermediate classes of adults from a variety of language backgrounds in which students completed two communication activities involving discussion and decision-making, one about a heart transplant problem and the other about a family planning problem. One task was done in a teacher-fronted, whole-class mode with students moving together at the same pace through the activity, and the other was done in groups of four. The study gave evidence of students negotiating meaning through, for example, clarification checks such as:

S1 She is on welfare

S2 *What do you mean by welfare?*

(Pica and Doughty 1985: 236)

or:

S1 This is very bad ...  
I think she never  
estay home.  
(ibid.)

S2 *You're opposed to that? You  
don't think that's a good idea?*

and confirmation checks such as:

S1 The homemaker woman  
(ibid.)

S2 *The homemaker?*

It also showed the ways in which students helped each other through correction, as in:

S1 It's *illegally* for the system  
(ibid.: 238)

S2 It's *illegal* for the system

and through completion, as in:

S1 *Yes, I know ... but the  
mental—*  
(ibid.: 237)

S2 *mentality*

Among the results were the following: the students produced more output in the groupwork; each student was exposed to more input in the groupwork; completions and corrections were more common in the groupwork; there was no difference in the level of accuracy in the student's output in both situations, but there was little evidence of negotiation of meaning in either situation. This last result was surprising as the tasks had been chosen as typical of those used in communicative classrooms, which aim to stimulate negotiation of meaning. However, what seemed to happen was domination of the groupwork by a few individuals. This led the researchers to pose the question of what kinds of tasks are best for obliging learners to negotiate meaning. The relative value of pairwork information-gap tasks, or, say, group discussion tasks, in terms of which need participation from all group members and which encourage negotiation of meaning, has been the focus of further studies. We will look at some of the outcomes in Chapter 8.

Claims about the value of small-group interaction in the classroom for language acquisition provide attractive support for views of educationists about the value of collaborative work and the importance of reducing dependence on teachers. They also fit well with one of the aims of communicative language teaching, which is to develop learners' ability to participate effectively in conversation.

However, an important issue in the use of work in small groups is that it implies risk-taking. Being in face-to-face encounters requires assertiveness. This may be difficult for individual personalities and may even run counter

to the educational ethos which some learners have experienced previously. It is an issue which teachers will need to take into account when considering the individual needs of their learners in the educational system which they are part of.

### 1.2.4 *The role of error*

With a view of language learning as a creative construction process comes the view that error is an inevitable and positive part of that process. Attitudes have therefore moved on from those of the behaviourists in the 1950s and 1960s who saw error as something to be prevented as far as possible through intensive modelling and eradicated through intensive drilling. Errors are now seen as reflections of a learner's stage of interlanguage development.

There are conflicting views on the role of error correction in the classroom. For example, Krashen's interest in the possible parallels between children's acquisition of their first language and adult second language acquisition led him to suggest that error correction had dubious value in the classroom. Children, he claimed, do not generally receive explicit negative feedback on the accuracy of their language and, by analogy, adults do not require constant correction with its dangers of distraction and demotivation. However, critics were quick to point out that adult learners can be encouraged to process error correction in useful ways, and the role of the teacher is to provide feedback which learners can work on in order to refine their understanding and move to the next stage of interlanguage.

The treatment of error requires consideration of many issues. Whether or not to perform the role of diagnoser and corrector of errors is only the first. If we decide to undertake this role, we will need a careful policy for making decisions about what, when, and how to correct. Such a policy will be considered in Chapters 8 and 9.

The appropriate question to ask at the end of this section is what insights in general can we gain from the work going on in the field of second language acquisition, given the uncertain findings of studies? Perhaps the most important insight is that however much teachers and textbooks try to control what is learned in the classroom, in actual fact the learners in a class will learn different things at different rates from the input and practice. In other words, there is no easy direct relationship between the teaching objectives of our lessons and the learning outcomes for the students. Understanding this will help us to realize that our major role is to provide conditions which are conducive to learning. However, there is increasing evidence that learners progress faster with meaningful language practice in a rich linguistic environment and with an informed policy of error correction on the part of the teacher.

Certainly it can be of value to English language teachers to keep an ear open to discussions issuing from the field of second language acquisition as they can inform, confirm, challenge, and excite.

### 1.3 How do differences among learners affect learning processes and teaching procedures?

In the extract at the beginning of this chapter, Rufino commented on his need to keep a sense of his pupils as individuals. This comment does not only come from a humanistic concern for the welfare of the individual. It also demonstrates that he is aware, as all experienced teachers are aware, that learners differ in ways that need careful thought when making decisions about course content and methodology. What exactly are the dimensions of individual difference among learners and what insights can teachers gain from studies of these?

Unfortunately, insights are unclear and fragmentary because research has been difficult. Language aptitude, as we shall see, has been measured by tests, but other dimensions have been investigated largely by introspective methods. Three methods in particular have been used. The first is self-report, responding to interview questions and questionnaires. Here, for example, is an introspection from an American in Japan, on the issues relating to using work in small groups in multicultural training sessions:

In particular our group work has helped me to explore more consciously the substantial cultural differences we have. I come from a society where great value is placed on the performance of the individual: here the ethos is one of consensus. How does that affect our discussions?

(Hedge 1998: 137)

A second method is self-observation, using diaries or immediate retrospective verbal reports. In this example, a learner writes of the anxiety that comes from comparison of her progress with that of her peers and her feelings of competitiveness:

I'm starting to find that my colleagues know more vocabulary than me. It's because they have 3 extra hours. ... It irritates me that the others know more. It makes me want to join their extra lessons.  
(Ellis and Rathbone 1987: 157)

A third method is self-revelation, using think-aloud reports recorded on to cassette as learners actually perform tasks. Cohen (1987) gives a useful example,

from data he collected on himself as a learner, of his attempt to deal with a new Hebrew verb through analogy:

Now, how am I going to learn how to conjugate the verb *rigel* 'to spy' in Hebrew? Oh, I see. It is conjugated just like *diber* 'to speak'. So now I know its forms ... no problem.  
(Cohen 1987: 83)

These three introspective methods all depend on learners being able to give clear, accurate, and honest accounts of what they do. There is also the issue of self-revelation of whether their attempts to report what they do will affect what they would normally do in carrying out a language learning task.

However, problems in research methodology by no means invalidate the usefulness of teachers building awareness of individual differences and the implications these might hold for the management of learning. Our awareness has been slowly developing in relation to aptitude, learning style, and learning strategies, and the affective factors of personality and motivation.

### 1.3.1 *Aptitude*

It is quite common to hear people say 'She has a flair for languages', or even, more specifically, 'He has a good ear for languages', and there is a body of research evidence to suggest that some people do indeed have an aptitude for language learning. The problem with the research is that it is not conclusive as to what abilities constitute aptitude or how these relate to other factors such as intelligence. Two well-known language aptitude tests, still widely used, are the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll and Sapon 1955) and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (LAB) (Pimsleur 1966). These generally put forward a multi-componential view of aptitude as comprising four components: auditory ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability, and memory. Each of these components is tested in order to predict whether a student is likely to be successful in learning a foreign language. For example, the MLAT has a test of grammatical sensitivity to the first language which asks students to identify words in two sentences which have the same grammatical function. Can you decide which word underlined in the second sentence has the same function as 'London' in the first sentence?

LONDON is the capital of England.

He liked to go fishing in Maine.

A    B    C            D    E

(Carroll and Sapon 1955: 5)

(The answer is, of course, 'he' as, like 'London', it is the subject of the sentence.)

In most cases aptitude testing, if it is used at all, will already have been undertaken during a selection process for foreign language learning. It is typically done in many countries for recruitment purposes into bodies such as the army or the civil service. However, discussion in recent years has brought out implications which are of importance for teachers. Ellis (1985), for example, makes the point that the tests focus on language form rather than its communicative aspects and might therefore indicate learners who will be advantaged in more formal classroom learning. To take another example, Skehan (1989) comments that, given the composite nature of aptitude, students who achieve the same overall score on an aptitude test could well have different strengths and weaknesses among the components, and teachers working with students selected through such a test should take this into account.

### 1.3.2 *Learning style and learning strategies*

The components of aptitude measured by the tests described in the previous section all relate to language. More recent research has looked at other variables which seem to correlate positively with successful language learning. For example, a global learner is believed to prefer learning through global exposure while an analytic learner likes to analyse elements in detail. This might influence the learner's response to methods of presenting language. For example, in dealing with a text a global learner might predict and infer to get an overall understanding, while an analytic learner might search for small details and try to follow accurately the precise relationships between different parts of the text. Some learners can tolerate ambiguity better than others and wait for further, disambiguating information. This might well advantage beginners dealing with the presentation of simplified grammatical rules, such as:

Use *some* in positive statements.

Use *any* in questions and negative statements.

These learners may quickly see exceptions to the rule in language they are exposed to, as the rules are far more complex.

These characteristics are now seen as aspects of *cognitive style* or *learning style*, which can be generally defined as a characteristic and preferred way of approaching learning and processing information. The question is whether and in what ways this individual style affects language learning: the picture so far remains unclear. However, teachers of multicultural classes or expatriate teachers of monolingual classes in unfamiliar cultures will need to keep in mind that a possible cause of differences in cognitive style is the kind of teaching methodology that learners have experienced during their educational careers, and that this will have been culturally influenced.

There is evidence to suggest that culture, as learned by the child from family, community, and school, has a strong influence on learning style. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex issue, here are a few examples. Hofstede (1986) suggests that Chinese children, in learning an ideographic writing system, learn to see patterns and to learn by rote. Reid (1987) found that Korean students, in terms of sensory preference, are more visual than US or Japanese students. In other words, they like to read and receive visual input. Brown (1987) suggests that Anglo-Americans have an analytic style. On the other hand, Egyptian students (Oxford and Burry-Stock 1995) take a global approach. These and other studies are reviewed in a survey article (Oxford and Anderson 1995) which suggests the need for further research and review but which also points out the need for teachers' awareness of the issues.

The general implication of possible mismatches between learners and expatriate teachers is clear. The Anglo-American teacher of Egyptian students could well experience a cultural clash of learning styles. And with regard to the multi-cultural classroom, insights into culture and learning style highlight the teacher's need to create a variety of learning activities to cater for the range of styles.

A closely related orientation to researching language learning style has been to investigate the strategies that are used by successful language learners. These are techniques used by learners to deal with input, assimilate new language, store, retrieve, and practise using it. Oxford (1990), for example, provides a comprehensive list which can be used by teachers to prepare students for learning. Two items from her list are as follows:

#### **Setting Goals and Objectives**

*Setting aims for language learning*, including long-term goals (such as being able to use the language for informal conversation by the end of the year), or short-term objectives (such as finishing reading a short story by Friday).

#### **Self-Monitoring**

*Identifying errors in understanding or producing the new language*, determining which ones are important (those that cause serious confusion or offense), tracking the source of important errors, and trying to eliminate such errors.

(Oxford 1990: 139, 140)

The idea that there are identifiable strategies used by good learners which might be trained in the classroom has led to great interest among teachers and textbook writers, who have attempted both to find ways of improving the strategies learners already have and to raise their awareness about others they might develop. Chapter 3 takes up the topic of strategy training in more detail.

### 1.3.3 *Affective factors*

Most discussions have limited affective factors to personality characteristics, attitudes, and emotional responses to the language learning process. The major problem of research in this area is that data gathered by introspective methods using questionnaires and self-report often does not seem to agree with observed behaviour. Better instruments are needed. It is therefore difficult to make generalizations. However, this in itself is a useful insight for teachers given that sweeping generalizations about learners are not uncommon in these areas.

For example, there is a widely held view that extrovert learners are likely to be more successful than introverted learners, possibly because they are more assertive, more willing to experiment and take risks, and more able to make the social contacts they need to practise language. This view, however, is not conclusively supported by the findings of research. Furthermore, we need to keep the exigencies of the classroom situation clearly in mind. It may well be the case that extrovert students benefit from oral work in small groups where their assertiveness enables them to dominate and their willingness to take risks facilitates practice, but in a whole-class mode of learning, as McDonough (1983) indicates, the extroverts may be silenced by an irritated teacher. Perhaps the important implication for the teacher is to balance these personality differences by ensuring an equal share of attention and opportunity to contribute.

Ethnocentricity is an attitudinal variable which has been investigated, and it will not surprise experienced teachers that studies show a negative correlation with language learning. Perhaps the significant implication for the teacher working where English language learning is compulsory is caution in the portrayal of the related English-speaking culture, avoidance of stereotyping, and the building of positive attitudes to the study of English as a curriculum subject through motivating content and tasks.

In terms of emotional responses to learning, a variable which has received much attention is anxiety. Bailey (1995) for example, links anxiety to competitiveness and argues that if we can discover its various causes we will be in a better position to reduce it. She effected this in her own language learning by keeping a diary and then categorizing the manifestations of anxiety recorded in it, both those which facilitated learning by pushing her to perform better and those which inhibited learning.

She derived the following seven categories:

- 1 Overt—though private—comparison of myself with other students (e.g., self-ranking, use of comparatives and superlatives, comparison in particular skills areas, etc.).



- 2 Emotive responses to such comparisons (anxiety when I didn't compare favorably with the others and elation when I did); including emotional reactions to other students (e.g., 'the girl' who'd been to France, the girl whose grammar book I bought, etc.); connotative uses of language (for instance, the foot-race imagery) in the diary entries sometimes reveal this emotion.
- 3 The desire to outdo the other students; here realized as the tendency to race through exams in order to finish first.
- 4 Emphasis on tests and grades, especially with reference to the other students.
- 5 The desire to gain the teacher's approval.
- 6 Anxiety experienced during the language class, often after making errors on material I felt I should have known (i.e., a discrepancy between an idealized self-image and a realistic assessment of myself as a language learner).
- 7 Withdrawal from the language-learning experience when the competition was overpowering.

(Bailey 1995: 175-6)

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) looked in more detail at anxiety in the classroom. The greatest anxiety seems to relate to negative experiences in speaking activities. This would confirm the experience of many teachers, but the suggestion that arises from such studies, that anxiety is a response learned through early experiences and that it can increase until the whole process of learning is badly affected, emphasizes the need for 'humanistic' approaches in the widest sense of the word. It implies that teachers have both the power and the responsibility to counter the development of anxiety by building self-confidence through positive early experiences, through providing reassuring feedback, and through promoting self-perception of developing proficiency.

Krashen (1985) has suggested the notion of the *affective filter*. This is a representation of the way in which affective factors such as attitude, anxiety, competitiveness, and other emotional responses can help or hinder language learning. The filter can be imagined as a sliding barrier which moves into place when a student is, for example, tired, dispirited, tense, or angry. It is which prevents the processing of input. A learner who has generally negative attitudes towards learning English will have a high affective filter and the task for the teacher will be substantial. The precise functioning of this filter is not explained, for example in relation to how it might affect the attention that students pay or do not pay to various elements of input. However, the

concept of the filter highlights the role of the teacher in creating beneficial conditions for language learning.

In summary, then, although we have little conclusive evidence on the role of affective factors, some studies have proved to be of value to the teacher in challenging common assumptions and in suggesting areas for concern.

### 1.3.4 *Motivation for learning English*

The degree to which any of the factors discussed so far in this chapter will become significant in a particular learning and teaching situation will depend partly on the reasons why learners are learning English. Rufino's pupils were aware of how English would give them mobility in the European community. Adult learners returning to study may regard language learning as a hobby or cultural pursuit worthy of the educated person, or may have pressing reasons for wishing to communicate in English. In many state school systems now, where the pupils' future use of English is uncertain, a primary aim is to build communicative potential. Any individual may be influenced by a variety of motivations which will affect such things as anxiety, or attitude, or willingness to try new learning strategies.

A group of twenty Japanese students, at the beginning of intensive English language instruction at a UK university, were each asked to give four major motivations for learning English. The following list of statements represents in general the reasons given by members of the group and their rank-ordering:

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| 1 To be able to communicate with people in an international language, both at home in Japan and while travelling in other countries | 20 |
| 2 To be able to read a wide range of English language sources for study purposes in the UK and in Japan                             | 16 |
| 3 To have a better chance of employment, status, and financial reward in the job market   | 12 |
| 4 To be able to read and listen to English language media for information and pleasure  | 9  |
| 5 To find out more about the people, places, politics etc. of English-speaking cultures   | 7  |
| 6 To take up a particular career, e.g. English language teaching, work in an international company                                  | 6  |
| 7 To be able to participate successfully in the country I will be living in for six months  | 5  |

8 To read English-language literature	3
9 Because of parental pressure	2

(Author's data)

This list suggests two kinds of motivation for learning English: needing a language as an instrument to achieve other purposes such as doing a job effectively or studying successfully at an English-speaking institution, or wishing to integrate into the activities or culture of another group of people. Indeed, Gardner and Lambert (1972) termed these two as integrative and instrumental motivation. These two kinds of motivation can be demonstrated by the statements they gave students of French in Canada against which to indicate their own reasons for learning. Of the following statements, the first two are taken as indicative of integrative motivation and the second two of instrumental motivation:

- It will enable me to gain good friends more easily among French-speaking people.
  - It should enable me to begin to think and behave as the French do.
  - One needs a good knowledge of at least one foreign language to merit social recognition.
  - I need it in order to finish high school.
- (Gardner and Lambert 1972: 148)

This integrative-instrumental distinction may be most relevant to bilingual societies such as Canada where one language spoken in the community is a minority language, or to short-stay situations in the target language community.

A decade later, Gardner and Smythe's (1981) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) usefully shows the complex of areas under investigation by that time. There are four main categories. The first is motivation, which involves desire to learn a language, intensity of effort to achieve this, and attitudes towards learning the language. The second is integrativeness, which involves attitudes towards the target language group and which touches on the affective factor of ethnocentricity. The third involves attitudes towards the language teacher and the language course. The fourth concerns measures of anxiety in classroom situations and in using the language. It is now clear that motivation is a highly complex phenomenon consisting of a number of variables. It is also clear that the high correlations that studies show between motivation and successful learning confirm what is already indisputable among teachers: that motivation is of crucial importance in the classroom, whether learners arrive with it or whether they acquire it through classroom experiences.

Perhaps the most useful perspective for the teacher to take is to consider what aspects of motivation can be changed and to focus on creating successful

er resources which will enhance motivation. Ellis (1993b), for example, has made the point that we need to explore more fully the factors involved in motivating students – a task as this is something over which the teacher has some control. It would certainly be worth any teacher's time to create a checklist of ways to motivate learners in the classroom. Given the factors discussed in this chapter, it might begin like this:

- Give some time to considering group dynamics and to how to build cohesiveness within the class.
- Make sure that there is sufficient variety of input (listening, reading), of pace and intensity, of interaction, and of activity to allow learners to work in their own style and with their own strategies.
- Show awareness of differences in motivation, in emotional responses, in strategies, etc., and encourage learners to build awareness of their own preferences.
- Acknowledge that language learning is a serious endeavour requiring perseverance and involving anxiety, and be sure to give reassurance.

A recurring comment throughout this section on individual differences in learners is the uncertainty that exists in the methodology for investigating them, in the distinctions that can usefully be made in trying to classify them, and in the possible implications for the teacher. Certainly, we are not in a position to say that there are certain attitudes, personality characteristics, emotional dispositions, and learning strategies that somehow create the generically 'good language learner'.

However, there is little doubt that individual differences exist and they play a significant role in language learning. For the teacher the challenge must be how to 'enable' each learner according to his or her individual characteristics and cultural background. It may be a question of flexibility in materials design, or variety in skills work or classroom interaction. There may well be value in raising awareness in learners of their own styles and strategies and in helping them to refine and apply these in more independent resource-based learning where individualization is possible. Motivation is certainly an issue to be borne in mind when reflecting on any of the topics discussed in this book.

## 1.4 What factors of context should teachers take into account?

As we have seen in Rufino's account, we need to consider characteristics of the learning situation. Most of these are outside the teacher's control but they will bear heavily on decisions about choice of resources and classroom

procedures. For ease of discussion they can be divided into social factors and educational factors.

Social attitudes towards English language learning will partly determine how much effort teachers have to put into motivating children, but so will social exposure to the language. The presence of English in the community will immediately facilitate practice opportunities such as writing reviews of English films and TV programmes, keeping a diary of extra-curricular activities, outside visits, or encounter projects. Its absence creates greater but not insuperable challenges for teachers, who will need to think about sources of authentic input, about manageable out-of-class practice, and about creating a balance of skills work to make the most productive use of class and out-of-class time.

The educational system in which teachers work will be influenced by cultural notions of authority which affect the potential roles of teachers and learners. Another factor will be whether the system allows for 'retaking' courses. This will determine whether or not the teacher is faced with a gradually increasing range of proficiency in classes as they move through the years. This is a real problem that many teachers face and the issues of mixed-ability teaching deserve far greater professional attention in ELT. At the very least it supports arguments for rich, varied, and flexible learning resources. But there are other factors which have more to do with the institution and all provide potential or constraint. For example:

- the extent to which the materials in use train for public examinations and the extent to which deviation from these may disadvantage students in this respect, notwithstanding the benefits of alternatives
- the hours available for teaching and the distribution of those hours
- the existence of institutional or departmental policies for such things as marking or homework and the flexibility of these
- the physical constraints of the classroom
- class size
- the resources available in the classroom and in the institution
- the cohesion that exists among English language teachers and the degree to which it fosters teamwork
- the status of teachers in the hierarchy and their involvement in book selection, policy development, etc.
- the financial/contractual status of teachers and whether they work in one institution or several
- the interest of management in continuing professional development through in-service sessions, projects in materials design, etc.
- whether classes are monolingual or multilingual.

The examination system, for example, is usually a heavily constraining factor, especially where examinations are gatekeepers to higher education or good

employment prospects. It would be a matter of high risk for a teacher not to train students for these. With regard to other factors, teachers may have more flexibility. For example, to take up the last point on the list, monolingual classes facilitate use of the first language in the classroom and it is useful to work out a personal policy for this which can be explained and discussed in class. Many teachers feel uneasy about using the mother tongue but there are clearly advantages in doing so in some instances, for example to give a quick translation of words like 'cherry' or 'hedgehog', or to talk about learning approaches and strategies with beginners.

## 1.5 What roles can teachers and learners play in the learning process?

Rufino commented on his enjoyment of project work as one kind of learner-based teaching which allowed him to stand back a little and take on a less dominant role while his pupils organized themselves in collaborative work. The concept of 'role' has become very popular in ELT and is a term in common usage to denote the functions that teachers and learners perform during the course of a lesson. In the social setting of the classroom, teachers' and learners' expectations about what are appropriate functions in various learning tasks will determine the roles that each performs, and these will be culturally influenced.

### 1.5.1 *The teacher's roles and responsibilities*

The range of roles that teachers perform can be illustrated by analysing the sample of lesson notes from the Teacher's Book of *The Pre-intermediate Choice* shown in Materials extract 1.A. The sample is taken from the early stages of a lesson in which the aims are to revise and practise the present perfect tense and words for countries and nationalities. The corresponding section from the Student's Book is shown in Materials extract 1.B. The activities are focused on language forms and the teacher takes a dominant role in what is a largely teacher-fronted classroom. However, the final part of the sequence sees the class moving into pairwork with a corresponding change in the teacher's role.

Using a framework suggested by Harmer (1991), it is possible to identify the teacher in a number of roles in this lesson: as *controller* in eliciting nationality words; as *assessor* of accuracy as students try to pronounce the words; as *corrector* of pronunciation; as *organizer* in *giving instructions* for the pairwork, *initiating* it, *monitoring* it, and *organizing feedback*; as *prompter* while students are working together; and as *resource* if students need help with words and

## Materials extract 1.A

# 7 Spotlight

Present Perfect (experience) vs Past Simple; ever, past participles (1)

## 1 Preparation

1 Look at the travel souvenirs on this page with another student. What do you think?

1 Where has their owner been?  
2 What makes you think this?

Example: I think she's been to Japan because she's got a Japanese kimono.


2 Ask your partner about these and other countries.

Example: Have you ever been to ... ?

Yes, once/twice/three times.

Yes, lots of times.

No, never.



(Mohamed and Aklam: *The Pre-intermediate Choice SB*, page 40)

structures during the pairwork. Harmer's framework deals exclusively with roles that relate to classroom procedures. Other frameworks include categories which move beyond the immediate pedagogic concerns of getting the learning task done into areas much influenced by attitudes in the social and cultural environment.

A study undertaken with a multicultural group of experienced teachers (Karavas-Dukas 1995) from widely differing worldwide contexts and representing a variety of teaching approaches, asked them what roles they performed as teachers. The list below shows the role categories that emerged and the percentage of teachers who mentioned functions pertaining to a particular category. As can be seen most clearly in category 1, teachers had different labels to describe the same or similar roles. However, what is noticeable here is a general balance among the four main categories of source of expertise, management roles, source of advice, and facilitator of learning.

*Materials extract 1.B***1 Preparation****AIMS**

- To revise and practise the use of the Present Perfect, +/- ever, to talk about experiences.
- To revise a variety of country and nationality words.

1 Students say which countries they think the owner of the travel souvenirs has been to.

**Possible answers**

I think she has been to Russia because she has got some Russian dolls.

I think she has been to Africa because she has got an African mask.

I think she has been to Egypt because she has got an Egyptian papyrus.

I think she has been to Tunisia because she has got a Tunisian pottery lamp.

I think she has been to Libya because she has got a Libyan carpet.

I think she has been to Pakistan because she has got a Pakwani horse.

**NB** There is also an Ecuadorian ponzo on the page.

Refer students to the travel souvenirs and ask them to name them open-class. Elicit nationality adjective with the object. If students have problems pronouncing the nationality words, this is the time to correct them. As you do so highlight shifting word-stress on country and nationality words. (Ja'pan vs Japan'ese, Egypt vs Egyptian and Ecuador vs Ecu'a'dorian.)

Elicit the example sentence from their book by asking an individual student which country they think the owner of the kimono has been to.

Get students to repeat the example sentence, stressing the country in the first part of the sentence and the name of the object in the second part eg. I think she's been to *Russia* because she's got some *Russian dolls*.

Put students in pairs to make similar sentences about other objects before checking open-class.

(Mohamed and Aklam: *The Pre-intermediate Choice SB*, page 58)

**1 Source of Expertise (46.4%)****1.1 Denoting authoritarian stance?**

Instructor

Presenter

Actor

Pedagogist

**1.2 Denoting supportive stance?**

Informant

Input provider

Information provider

Resource

Source of knowledge

**2 Management roles (35.7%)**

Manager

Organizer

Director

Administrator

Public relations officer

Arranger

**3 Source of advice (53.5%)**

Counsellor

Advisor

Personal tutor

Psychologist

Listener

**4 Facilitator of learning (64.2%)**

Learning facilitator

Helper

Guide

**5 Sharing roles (17.8%)**

Negotiator

Participant

Student



Catalyst to group discussion Prompter Mediator	Cooperator
<b>6 Caring roles (25%)</b>	<b>7 Creator of classroom atmosphere (14.2%)</b>
Friend Sister/mother Caretaker Supporter	Entertainer Motivator Source of inspiration
<b>8 Evaluator (10.7%)</b>	<b>9 Example of behaviour and hard work (3.5%)</b>

(Karavas-Dukas 1995)

It seems that a large number of the teachers perceived a need to fulfil the general roles of instructor, organizer, counsellor, and helper and, indeed, these are common to a range of classroom methods. However, as well as being partly dependent on personality or particular method, the precise interpretation of these functions would also be to some extent socially and culturally dependent. In a setting where the teacher is afforded high status, is an authority figure, and remains at some distance from students, prompter might well refer to prompting the individual student with a display question to respond in a typical classroom sequence of initiation → response → feedback, for example:

**Teacher** What's Peter's job, Marianne?

**Student** He's a ... [*pause*]

**Teacher** Yes, he's a car ...

**Student** mechanic ... he's a car mechanic.

**Teacher** Yes, good.

On the other hand, in a setting where the teacher is perceived as a more equal partner in the learning process, and where teacher and students participate jointly in activities, as in writing conferences, *prompter* could refer to the teacher's role in helping a student to remember and formulate a point, as in the following extract:

**Teacher** Do you remember how we described Mr Birling's character yesterday? We said he was ...

**Student** Yes, he was a hypocrite, he was unfeeling, cold ...

The potential problem for teachers, when experiencing change in methodology and in the roles they need to perform, lies in the precise circumstances in which they need to perform them. In the first example above, the teacher remains at the front of the class, in control and responsible for learner activity. In the second example, the teacher has given responsibility to groups

of students for their own activity and has sat down with a group in the course of circulating to monitor and help.

It is when there is a tension between the requirements of the learning task for teacher behaviour and cultural expectations of what is appropriate teacher behaviour that problems can arise for both teachers and learners. For a teacher to move successfully from functioning traditionally as prompter in the first situation above to functioning successfully in the second situation may require far more than a simple change in methodology. It may require a change in self-perception. And for the students to accept that a teacher sits with them as they work together in class requires a corresponding change in their perceptions of authority and responsibility. This may be particularly the case with secondary-school classes where authority entails discipline.

Research in recent years has attempted to investigate the responsibilities of the teacher in terms of providing effective teaching, though the concept of effectiveness in relation to teaching is quite complex. Many teachers would list careful planning of a coherent pedagogic process as a necessary dimension of teacher competence. Indeed, research in education supports this belief by suggesting that effective teaching pays attention to creating a logical sequence of activities in a lesson, with clear aims and clear links. In terms of lesson planning, this means achieving a balance between a 'magical mystery tour' and 'It's Thursday, this must be Venice'. With regard to the latter, every teacher trainer has a version of a typical lesson extract from an over-structured lesson. Here is one of an anxious trainee doing a 'warm-up' to include revision of the past simple tense, and concerned to keep to the five minutes allocated in her plan:

**Teacher** And what did you do in the summer, Sven?

**Sven** I went to my summer house in the country.

**Teacher** Very nice. And what did you do, Gunilla?

**Gunilla** My husband and I ... we went to Rhodos for the sun.

**Teacher** Mm, it's lovely there. And how about you, Bo?

**Bo** I came a Buddhist and spent the summer in a monastery in Tibet.

**Teacher** ... became, Bo. Say after me ... became ... Good. Mai Brit, tell us what you did.

Over-precise timing can result in teaching the lesson but not necessarily the students.

The field of educational management has much to say about planning and what are considered to be the characteristics of an effective plan. For example, Everard and Morris (1985) suggest the following: it is purposeful, task specific, temporal, integrated, adaptable, and cost-effective. It is interesting

to review these characteristics in terms of effective lesson planning. If we applied them to lesson planning, the following features could be derived:

- The learning activities are clearly linked to prioritized aims for the lesson.
- The types of activity are clearly identified and the learner and teacher roles associated with them.
- Times are specified but timing is monitored for its appropriateness as the lesson proceeds.
- The activities are interdependent in seeking to achieve the aims of the lesson.
- The plan allows for flexibility and contingency in adapting to the emerging needs of the students and to the unexpected event.
- The plan is economical in terms of time and energy spent on input and output.

These features can be observed in the lesson plan overleaf. This teacher has decided that it is useful to write in the interactions as a check on her planning, that she has an appropriate variety in pace, in intensity of learning load, and in the balance between input and practice. Her timings are approximate. In practice, she found the students needed less time to formulate their sentences and she was therefore able to build in more time for feedback.

Another aspect of teaching competence is the ability to manage activities and interactions successfully in the sense that learners know what they need to do and why they are doing it, are motivated to work actively, are monitored and guided when help is needed, and can work undisturbed by discipline problems. The management of interaction needs care and subtlety, as reflected in this teacher's views of groupwork:

I think monitoring of any group activity has to be done very subtly and there are a number of points to look for. I think, when the group work starts initially, one has to allow each group to gather its own momentum. One cannot go to a group and say, for example, 'Right, you've got this, this and this to do', and then you try and push them at a rate which is faster than they are capable of going at the beginning. So, at the initial stages of group work I tend to stand back and let each group gather its own momentum. If at any time I see a group is stuck, then I go in as quietly and unobtrusively as possible and I try to encourage them by asking a few stimulating questions, what I hope are stimulating questions, which will get their minds working on the right track.  
(Cauldwell 1983: 27)

As this aspect of classroom management looms large as a concern of trainee and novice teachers, it is quite common to find suggestions for self-help composed by tutors, as in the checklist on page 33 for teachers of multilingual adult classes.



- |  |                       |               |
|--|-----------------------|---------------|
| 5 Ask concept questions, e.g.:<br>Which question form is more sure?<br>What part of the verb are <i>passed</i> , <i>won</i> ?  | T ↔ class             | 1 minute      |
| 6 Ask the students to form pairs. Give each pair some more pictures and ask them to make as many deductions as they can. They should write a list for each picture. Go round the class monitoring, providing vocabulary where needed, and checking the work. | S ↔ S<br>T ↔ pairs SS | 10-15 minutes |
| 7 Ask each pair to show the class their pictures in turn and to tell each other their deductions. Encourage cross-class questioning. Write any uncertain vocabulary on the board for later review.   | Pairs SS ↔ class      | 10-15 minutes |
| 8 Ask the students to find similar magazine pictures, write sentences about them, and bring them to class.   | T ↔ class             | 3 minutes     |

- Try writing down your instructions for the activity in full in your lesson notes and make them clear and concise.
- When you plan your lesson, make decisions about group size and where groups can be located in the classroom.
- Plan the composition of groups according to levels of proficiency, friendship, and mix of first languages.
- Prepare how to explain the rationale for the activity to your students.
- Ask one group to demonstrate part of the activity, if this is possible, before dividing the class.
- Give students time to ask for clarification.
- Ask students to repeat your instructions in the class, and elicit from them the stages they will go through.

It is evident from the Teacher's Book for *The Pre-intermediate Choice* (Materials extract 1.A), and from the lesson plan above, and also from teachers' and tutors' concerns, that planning, managing interactions, monitoring learning, giving instructions, and giving feedback are the teacher's main responsibilities. These will be revisited in forthcoming chapters as we look in detail at the teaching of particular areas of language. What, then, we may ask, are the reciprocal roles and responsibilities of the learners?

### 1.5.2 *The learner's roles and responsibilities*

The lesson plan on pages 32–33 shows a set of aims and a sequence of activities designed by the teacher as a means to fulfil those aims. The teacher is clear about the purposes of various activities, but to what extent are the learners? The question of a possible mismatch between teachers and learners in their perceptions of the aims and outcomes of classroom activities has been one focus of recent research. For example, Block (1994) collected oral diary accounts from six of fourteen students and from their teacher in an EFL class which met daily for two-and-a-half hours over a period of a month. By posing a set of questions as guidelines for their accounts, for example 'What were the activities which most stood out in today's class?'; 'What do you think was the purpose of these activities?' (ibid.: 475) he collected data which suggested that teachers and learners were 'operating to different systems for describing and attributing purpose to tasks' (ibid.: 473). In particular, an activity which the teacher seemed to view as routine, as a way of surviving the first part of the lesson, was taken up seriously by learners who perceived it as valuable and in line with their needs and who engaged with it to achieve useful outcomes. One issue arising from this study is whether teaching is more effective when teachers and learners share the same purpose in approaching an activity and, if so, how shared perceptions can be achieved.

Such issues are at the heart of recent debate about learner-centred ELT, a concept which has been defined from several different perspectives. One perspective, which applies usefully to situations in which adult learners can specify discernible needs for learning English, is that of asking learners to contribute to the overall design of course content and the selection of learning procedures. This would go some way to preventing the kind of discrepancy in goals and perceptions that Block discovered. Suitable learner groups for this approach would be adult migrants or students entering higher education in English-medium institutions.

A second perspective on learner-centredness is that of learners contributing to the design of language learning activities (Clarke 1989b), an idea which would certainly ensure that the purposes of classroom activities were well understood. The idea has been taken up by Campbell and Kryszewska who describe it as 'learner-based' teaching and state its main principle as being 'that all class activities can be done using information that the learners themselves bring to class' (1992: 5). Such information can involve, for example, texts which learners find and for which they design reading activities.

A third perspective on learner-centredness is that of encouraging learners to take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own successful learning, not only by contributing to course or activity design in the ways described

above, but also by continuing their learning outside class, at home, or in self-access facilities. The teacher's reciprocal responsibility is to ensure that learners have effective strategies for planning, performing, and monitoring their independent learning.

However, the perspective which is perhaps most commonly understood and practised, is that of using a methodology which allows learners greater control over the learning process. Classroom observation suggests that motivated learners wish to do this anyway. The following transcript shows a class finding their own way through the problems with which an activity presents them and obliging the teacher to go along with them. The class are dealing with a jigsaw reading activity (see 2.4.2) in which three newspaper articles are read, each by different students, and each containing different pieces of information about an incident, as well as a common account. Students then form groups to piece the full information together. The teacher has just given careful instructions for the task.

- Teacher** OK. Let's start.
- Yu** Is it ... necessary ... to write note when we read? Can we speak ... without ...
- Ke** Yes, we must do this.
- Teacher** Well, it will ... um ... help ... you can write notes for each heading ... see ... Who? Where? When? ... and so on. Then you can add other information you hear later.
- Ao** So we have ... full facts.
- Yu** But can I write later when I listen?
- Teacher** Do what you think is most helpful for you. OK?
- Hir** What is 'outcome'?
- Teacher** Can someone explain?
- Ki** What happened after.
- Ta** Next.
- Teacher** Yes, what happened next ... the result, yes? OK everyone?
- Ao** What is this 'petty'?
- Hid** How much ... how many words do we ...
- (Author's data)

The teacher here seems to accept a need to relinquish control over the discourse, to let learners take over for a while, in order to get out of the activity what is most important to them. The example begs the interesting question of the extent to which teachers make available to learners opportunities to interact throughout a class in ways which assist their comprehension. Some classrooms are noticeable for the constant buzz of speaking as learners ask for clarification from the teacher and from each other.

These four perspectives on learner-centred teaching suggest a far wider range of roles for the learner than those performed in a traditional teacher-

dominated classroom. In contributing to course design, learners can research their needs, negotiate content, and help to monitor the progress of the course. In contributing to activity design, learners can explore and experiment. In developing more independent approaches, learners can plan, initiate, and organize their own work. And in a classroom where participation is high and its nature flexible, learners can question, clarify, suggest, and comment.

However, the degree to which any of these four perspectives can be taken up and explored in classrooms will depend on those factors we have investigated: factors to do with contextual constraints, with perceived roles and responsibilities of the teacher, with learner disposition and cultural expectations of classroom behaviour, with culturally influenced learning styles, and with motivations for learning English.

## 1.6 What roles can learning materials play?

Closely related to the roles of teachers and learners is the role of textbook materials. Any textbook is based on assumptions about learning, and the design of its activities implies certain roles for teachers and learners and assumes certain dispositions towards learning styles. In the early 1980s Allwright (1981) and O'Neill (1982) debated the role of learning materials in articles entitled respectively 'What do you want teaching materials for?' and 'Why use textbooks?' Allwright suggests that the use of textbook materials places emphasis on the *teaching* process perhaps at the expense of emphasis on the *learning* process, and that this may lead to 'teacher overload' and 'learner underinvolvement'. The logical outcome of an emphasis on learning, he argues, would be learning guides for students. There was little evidence of these in publisher's catalogues at his time of writing but some years later there was evidence of moves in the direction he advocated. For example, the excellent book by Ellis and Sinclair (1989) discussed in Chapter 3 is a move towards filling the gap; there is increasing inclusion of material to guide learners in some current textbooks as reported in survey reviews by Sinclair and Ellis (1992) and Lake (1997), and the development of institutional resources for self-access learning provides learners with opportunities for managing the course of learning themselves.

However, the revolution in the role of resources for learning that Allwright advocated can really only be described as a gradual and partial evolution of alternative roles. Perhaps the reasons for this lie in the benefits of textbook materials as outlined by O'Neill: they can offer a grammatical and functional framework which provides for the common needs of a group of learners; they allow students to prepare in advance; they provide quality of presentation, and they do not necessarily prevent a creative spinning-off in the classroom into all kinds of other activities.



The debate inevitably continues as it is at the heart of teachers' professional concerns. The content and quality of textbooks will determine the extent to which teachers can make use of insights from research into learning and learners. A group of teachers who were asked for their views of the potential and the limitations of textbooks offered the following; their comments reflect some of the points raised by Allwright and O'Neill:

'I've tried in recent years to encourage my students to work more independently and one of the ways they can do this, given that we don't have self-access resources here, is to prepare and preview a unit of the coursebook before we do it in class and then to go over it again when we've finished.'

'I tried last year to negotiate content as much as possible, but it was very, very hard work to find the relevant materials as we went along. In the second term we chose a coursebook together and added to it. The students said they appreciated following the sequence of the book. There was a grammatical syllabus in the map of the book and I think this fitted with their expectations of learning a language. It seemed to reassure them.'

'We have a dynamic head who is keen on in-service training and we've been working on Friday afternoons to develop some film-related materials. I've learned a lot about two things in particular: one was how to motivate pupils by challenging them to think and the other was how difficult it is to write clear instructions.'

'I don't really have an option. I teach nine to four every day and I need textbooks to survive. But we do have a member of staff with responsibility for building a bank of materials from things like our home-made handouts so we can share resources. It doesn't work that well yet. It's not easy to use other people's work, but the texts and leaflets people contribute are useful. One of my colleagues has put sets of photos in and they're good for groupwork.'

(Author's data)

The practical constraints outlined by the last teacher are an undeniable fact of life in many institutions and arguments about the relative merits of using commercial materials or not are academic to many teachers. They see their responsibility as choosing the most appropriate textbooks available for their classes. It is the enlightened head of department or director of studies who tries to facilitate professional development in staff by promoting opportunities for in-house materials design in teams. In any case, teachers need to build awareness of what teaching resources provide and of the care that needs to be taken in selecting and exploiting them.

Detailed criteria for selecting and evaluating textbooks are discussed in Chapter 10, but it is worth taking up one important aspect in this introductory chapter. This is the question of cultural content in materials, and the values and attitudes inherent in this. A number of writers in recent years (Valdes 1986; Byram 1989; Phillipson 1990) have reviewed the complex relationships that exist between language learning, language teaching, and culture, and some have focused specifically on the implications of using the target language culture as the vehicle for presenting the language in textbook materials (Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi 1990; Alptekin 1993). It is commonplace for materials published in a particular English-speaking culture to use that culture as a setting for stories and dialogues. One of the reasons often given for this is the link between language and culture, a link expressed in discussions on the nature of language. For example, Wright Mills (1972) writes:

Language, socially built and maintained, embodies ... social evaluations. ... A vocabulary is not merely a string of words; immanent within it are societal textures—institutional and political coordinates. (Wright Mills 1972: 62)

Indeed, given this link, where the stated aim of a school curriculum is to widen cultural horizons and increase understanding of other peoples and ways of life, it might be appropriate to teach English by embedding it in its cultural base, whether this be Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, Nigeria, the USA, or Britain, to name but a few. However, it is equally important to be aware of the dangers of cultural stereotyping.

Adaskou et al. (1990), while undertaking a textbook design project for secondary English in Morocco, developed a useful framework for making decisions about the cultural content of materials. They distinguish four meanings of the word 'culture', which are as follows:

- *The aesthetic sense*: by this they mean the art, literature, music, media, etc. to be found in English-speaking cultures.
- *The sociological sense*: by this they mean what has often been called 'life and institutions', that is, the nature of family life, work, leisure, customs, etc.
- *The semantic sense*: this relates to the points made by Wright Mills (1972) about the conceptual system embodied in the language.
- *The sociolinguistic sense*: by this they mean such things as politeness conventions, the ways in which language is governed by issues of status or age in relationships, and familiarity with rhetorical conventions in formal and informal letters, reports, and other written genres.

It could be argued that the last two meanings are inevitable elements in ELT materials, but decisions could be taken as to how explicit instruction should be when conventions differ between cultures. Inclusion of the first two

meanings is optional, and teachers will need to take this into account when assessing a given textbook against the aims of a course or the needs or motivations of learners. Further to this, one criterion for evaluating a book would be whether the picture it presents of the foreign language culture avoids stereotyping and gives an accurate reflection of the variety of people, lifestyles, settings, politics, and points of view that one 'culture' can encompass.

## 1.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to discuss some of the fundamental issues which affect our professional practice in ELT, and which are under constant review by researchers into second language acquisition, by theory builders in the disciplines of applied linguistics, and by teams of teachers working to formulate policies and practices for their own institutions. Good teachers have always taken a positively critical approach to appraising and developing their work, using what insights are available from their own and others' experience, and from the possible implications of research, especially from studies which are based in the language classroom. It is one of the ways in which we create our own continuing professional development.

One issue which this chapter has not addressed is: What exactly is it that we learn when we learn a second or foreign language? Or, to put it another way, what do we need to learn in order to be a proficient user of another language? This has been a focus of substantial discussion in our profession especially with the increasing use of communicative approaches and interactive classroom methodologies. It is to these questions that the next chapter turns.

### *Discussion topics and projects*

- 1 Review two or three English language textbooks in use in your institution and investigate the motivations they give learners for learning English, both explicitly as set out in their stated aims and implicitly, such as in the content of the material.
- 2 At the beginning of teaching a course with a new group of adolescent or adult students, what kinds of activity could you engage them in to:
  - (a) find out their reasons for learning English?
  - (b) motivate them towards their language learning task?
- 3 Does your institution have a policy for classroom methodology? If so, what is its source (for example, national guidelines, institutional policy document, procedures derived from in-service training of the staff)? What are the main principles of the methodology? What assumptions about language learning do you think they reflect?

- 4 How important are the explicit teaching of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary in your own classes?
- 5 A group of teachers on an in-service training course listed the following as the most important qualities a teacher needs to have:
  - sense of humour
  - self-confidence
  - sensitivity to learners as people
  - ability to build rapport
  - ability to be methodical.

Do you agree that all these are important? Would you add any others?

- 6 The text below presents a set of 'hopes' about the roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners. If you were to present a similar credo, what would you include?

#### What I hope for in a classroom

##### Students

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1 I hope to find the students involved in whatever they are doing, contributing to it and getting satisfaction from it on many levels of personality.</p>  | <p>That is to say, I hope <i>not</i> to find them concentrating on merely coming up with correct responses (even in a structure drill), or on grinding out correct sentences or free conversations just for the sake of grinding out correct sentences or free conversations.</p>  |
| <p>2 I hope to find the students comfortable and relaxed, even in the midst of intense intellectual activity or vigorous argument.</p>  | <p>2 (a) This does <i>not</i> mean that they are loafing on the job. In fact, students who are really comfortable with what they are doing are less likely to loaf.<br/>(b) This also means that the students are not apprehensive that they will be punished if they fail to live up to the teacher's expectations.</p> |
| <p>3 I hope to find that the students are listening to one another, and not just to the teacher. I also hope that they will be getting help and correction from one another, and not just from the teacher.</p> | <p>3 This means that the students are <i>not</i> like separate lamps plugged into a single power supply, in such a way that the power used by one diminishes the voltage available to the rest.</p>  |

**Teacher**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 4 The teacher is in general control of what is going on.  | 4 This does <i>not</i> mean that everything the students do comes as a direct response to a specific cue from the teacher.   |
| 5 The teacher allows/ encourages/requires originality from students, whether in individual sentences, or in larger units of activity, or in choice among a range of techniques.   | 5 This does <i>not</i> mean anarchy or chaos.  |
| 6 One of the first things I notice is whether the teacher seems relaxed and matter-of-fact in voice and manner, giving information about the appropriateness or correctness of what the students do rather than criticizing or praising them. | 6 The teacher does <i>not</i> , either by word or by unspoken message, say to students, 'Now always remember ...,' 'You shouldn't have forgotten ...,' 'You are a good/poor student,' or 'Now try to do this so that I may judge you on it.' |

(Stevick 1976: 159–60)

- 7 Look again at the dimensions of culture suggested by Adaskou et al. (1990) (see page 38). Evaluate a textbook in terms of those aspects of culture it includes.

**Further reading**

Lightbown, P. and N. Spada. 1999. *How Languages are Learned* (Second edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This book is a useful introduction to second language acquisition. It presents a clear overview of various theories of acquisition and issues arising from these. The authors also consider factors of individual difference in learners such as age, personality, learning styles, and motivation. The implications of the theories, issues, and factors for classroom teachers are then taken up and discussed.

McKay, S. L. 1992. *Teaching English Overseas: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The intended audience for this book is the native-speaker teacher of English who is planning to work overseas, but its usefulness is by no means restricted

to this type of reader. The author looks at how factors in the teaching and learning situation influence classroom teachers in their work. In Part One she considers in turn social, political, economic, and cultural factors. In Part Two she discusses the structure of educational systems and institutions. The book is illustrated with case studies and contains many practical suggestions for dealing with the professional issues arising from contextual factors.

**Skehan, P.** 1989. *Individual Differences in Second Language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold.

The book usefully reviews research up to 1989 into the ways in which learners differ from one another. It investigates the dimensions of language aptitude, motivation, language learning strategies, and affective and cognitive influences. The author draws conclusions about the possible role of these factors in the building of theories of second language acquisition.

**Wright, T.** 1987. *Roles of Teachers and Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The main aim of this book is to explore the roles that teachers and learners can play in the classroom and the factors which influence teacher-learner relationships. It also comments usefully on the role of materials in the classroom. The discussion is illustrated with analysis of a wide range of learning tasks and materials. The final section provides the teacher with ideas for personal classroom investigation and interpretation.

# 2

## THE COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM

---

*'Words are the Peoples: yet there is a choise of them to be made. ... They are to be chose according to the persons wee make speake, or the things wee speake of. Some are of the Campe, some of the Councellboard, some of the Shop, some of the Sheepe-coat, some of the Pulpit, some of the Barre, &c. And herein is seene their Elegance, and Propriety, when wee use them fitly ...'*

BEN JONSON

- 1 What are the components of communicative language ability?
- 2 Is communicative language ability a realistic goal for the English language classroom?
- 3 What are the issues for the communicative curriculum?
- 4 What are communicative tasks and what role do they have in learning and teaching?
- 5 How can we manage a communicative classroom?
- 6 What does communicative language teaching imply for authenticity in the classroom?
- 7 If we teach communicatively, what does this imply for testing?
- 8 What are the issues in applying a communicative approach in context?

### *Introductory task*

Consider Materials extract 2.A.

- 1 Do you see this as a communicative task?
- 2 What criteria did you use to arrive at your decision?

*Materials extract 2.A***VIII-1 PICTURE DIALOGUE GAME****Unit VIII / FUN AND GAMES / Level: Low Intermediate / Time: 20 minutes****Language function(s):** writing dialogues**Materials:** large pictures each showing two people talking**In class**

- 1 Bring in six to ten pictures, each one showing two people talking, and put them up at the front of the class. Make sure that all the students can see them clearly.
- 2 Arrange the students in pairs and ask each pair to choose one of the pictures to use as the basis of a short dialogue. The rest of the group should not know which pictures have been chosen. Give the students three or four minutes to
- write down what they think the two people in the picture are saying. Circulate, checking that the language is correct and helping as necessary.
- 3 Ask the pairs to read or, better still, act out their dialogues, each partner taking one role while the rest of the class tries to guess which picture has been chosen. Whenever possible, the students should justify their guesses.

(Sion (ed.): *Recipes for Tired Teachers*, page 94)

## 2.1 Introduction: the concept of communicative language ability

The ability to communicate effectively in English is now a well-established goal in ELT. It is by no means the only possible goal as we saw with the survey of Japanese students' reasons for studying English in 1.3.4. However, many adults can identify personal needs to communicate in spoken and written English and many schoolchildren are aware of future needs for international communication and mobility. Even in contexts where it is harder to see future purposes for English language communication among schoolchildren, it is often nevertheless thought to be sensible to build potential for this.

A brief review of statements from syllabus specifications and introductions to coursebooks will demonstrate the extent to which communicative ability has become a goal and communicative practice has become part of classroom procedure.

To be able to operate effectively in the real world, students need plenty of opportunity to practise language in situations which



encourage them to communicate their needs, ideas and opinions.  
(Abbs and Freebairn: *Blueprint Intermediate*, page 1)

To develop an ever improving capability to use English  
to communicate with others  
to acquire, develop and apply knowledge  
to think and solve problems  
to respond and give expression to experience;  
and within these contexts, to develop and apply an ever-increasing  
understanding of how English is organized, used and learned.  
(Clark, Scarino, and Brownell 1994: 37)

Where possible, language practice should resemble real life  
communication with genuine exchange of information and opinions.  
(Swan and Walter 1990: vii)

Note that reference is made here to both spoken and written English, to producing as well as receiving language. The communicative movement in ELT encompasses all modes of language use. It has, as one of its bases, a concept of what it means to know a language and to be able to put that knowledge to use in communicating with people in a variety of settings and situations. One of the earliest terms for this concept was *communicative competence* (Hymes 1972). In coining the term, Hymes demonstrated a shift of emphasis among linguists, away from a narrow focus on language as a formal system, a focus most clearly seen in the work of Chomsky (1965) who used the term 'competence' to describe knowledge of language:

We thus make a fundamental distinction between *competence* (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of the language), and *performance*, the actual use of the language in concrete situations.  
(Chomsky 1965: 4)

For Hymes, adding the 'communicative' element to 'competence' meant adding:

... rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. Just as rules of syntax can control aspects of phonology, and just as rules of semantics perhaps control aspects of syntax, so rules of speech acts enter as a controlling factor for linguistic form as a whole.  
(Hymes 1972: 278)

Hymes, as a sociolinguist, was concerned with the social and cultural knowledge which speakers need in order to understand and use linguistic forms. His view, therefore, encompassed not only knowledge but also ability to put that knowledge into use in communication, and for that reason other terms thought to be more effective in describing what it means to know and to be able to use language knowledge have developed. One of these is

Bachman's (1990) *communicative language ability*, and this will be used in this chapter.

Hymes's work proved to be of substantial influence among English language educationists, coinciding as it did with growing dissatisfaction with the predominantly structural approaches to English language teaching in the 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, other influences were at work in the ELT profession. As the field of English for specific purposes (ESP) developed to meet the professional or academic needs of English language users, course designers had to find ways of analysing real-world tasks in order to identify their communicative demands and to specify these as learning goals. At the same time the Council of Europe, in response to the needs of professional mobility between countries, was setting up a syllabus based on functional and situational views of language. Both movements contributed strongly to the development of 'the communicative classroom'.

As the goals for ELT became more concerned with enabling learners to interact successfully with members of other societies, so the explorations of applied linguists into the components of communicative ability assumed increasing relevance and usefulness to the work of classroom teachers and materials designers. The key components, as identified by a number of researchers (for example, Canale and Swain 1980; Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson 1984; Bachman 1990), can be listed as: *linguistic competence*, *pragmatic competence*, *discourse competence*, *strategic competence*, and *fluency*.

We will now explore these inasmuch as they provide insights into the goals and tasks for English language learners, and the issues which arise for teachers.

## 2.2 What are the components of communicative language ability?

### 2.2.1 *Linguistic competence*

Linguistic competence is concerned with knowledge of the language itself, its form and meaning. Stern (1983) includes these two aspects in his characterization of what it means to know a language:

The language user knows the rules governing his native language and he can 'apply' them without paying attention to them.

(Stern 1983: 342)

The native speaker has an intuitive grasp of the linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings expressed by language forms. (ibid.: 343)

Thus linguistic competence involves a knowledge of spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, word formation, grammatical structure, sentence structure, and linguistic semantics. We can judge, then, that a learner who is able to list orally and in writing the objects in a bowl, such as an apple, an orange, two bananas, and a bunch of grapes, is developing the ability to select specific vocabulary and knows its pronunciation and graphic forms. A learner who can add prefixes correctly to 'perfect', 'legal', 'happy', 'pleasing', and 'audible' to make the negative equivalents, is developing competence in using word-formation rules correctly. A learner who can describe recent events by using 'have/has' and the past participle of the main verb is developing grammatical competence in forming the present perfect tense. In these various ways the learner is acquiring linguistic competence in the second language.

An important point for the teacher to note is that linguistic competence is an integral part of communicative competence. As Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson point out: 'It is impossible to conceive of a person being communicatively competent without being linguistically competent' (1984: 168). It has perhaps been a misconception about communicative language teaching that it does not aim for a high standard of formal correctness. On the contrary, it is not incompatible to have correctness in the use of rules as an ultimate goal and, at the same time, to tolerate risk-taking and error in the classroom as part of the process of achieving communicative competence.

The role of grammar or formal accuracy has been a major concern in ELT in recent years and teachers need to address a number of issues in designing courses and classroom activities for learners. Acquisition of grammar will probably involve explicit knowledge of grammatical concepts, categories, and rules, and teachers will need to decide which description of these to choose from those available. There is also the question of which procedures for raising awareness of language form and for practising it are most effective: this will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Perhaps the most difficult question to resolve has been how to achieve a balance between 'focused' or 'form-focused' classroom activities which aim at linguistic accuracy and 'unfocused' activities which involve learners in negotiation of meaning and aim at fluency. What might the most appropriate balance of these be in one lesson and to what extent will this be determined by the age, stage of learning, and existing proficiency level of learners? How can these two types of activity be integrated in a lesson or unit of materials? What should the organizing principle be? And how can focused and unfocused activities be balanced and integrated to form a coherent

language learning programme over a period of time? These are key issues in ELT and they will be addressed throughout this book.

### 2.2.2 Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence is generally considered to involve two kinds of ability. In part it means knowing how to use language in order to achieve certain communicative goals or intentions. This has also been called *illocutionary competence*. An example would be 'It's so hot today.' This statement could have a number of *illocutionary forces*. It might be a statement about the physical atmosphere, a request to open the window, or an attempt to elicit the offer of a cold drink.

Methodology now tries to ensure that learners are given realistic presentations of language in use and its communicative intentions, for example, the present progressive might be presented through a dialogue, such as:

- Jack Hello, Anne, it's Jack here. Can I speak to Robert, please?  
 Anne Hi, Jack. Robert's working in the garage at the moment. Can I get him to call you back?  
 Jack Sure. Thanks.

Here is a typical situation in which reference is made to someone's actions at the time of speaking, one possible use of the present progressive. The presentation embeds the form in a *context of use*. This is in contrast to the technique many teachers were taught, myself among them, in the days of the structural approach to ELT, that of giving a running commentary while performing actions in the classroom, for example, 'I'm opening the window'; 'I'm closing the door'; 'I'm writing on the blackboard', and so on. Certainly the latter provided the form and its meaning, but the context of use was less than natural.

The present progressive, of course, has a number of functions, as the following examples demonstrate:

- He's coming up the steps.  
 I'm leaving in five minutes.  
 Sally is always complaining.

The first, if said to one burglar by another on lookout at the window of a house, observing the progress of a policeman towards the scene of their crime, could function as a warning. The second, if said by a parent to dawdling children, could be a reprimand. The third might function as criticism. Students will appreciate, through comparison with their first language, that these pragmatic conditions of use are likely to apply in any

language. However, in recent years, the functional approach has attempted to show the varying functional use of language forms by using functions rather than structures as their organizing principle. Some coursebooks arrange content in units entitled, for example, 'Talking about recent events', 'Inviting', or 'Speculating about the future'. In this way, a particular structure such as the present progressive can be revisited in units entitled 'Talking about present actions' (for example, 'She's washing her hair'); 'Talking about the immediate future' (for example, 'They're moving house tomorrow'), or 'Describing current situations' (for example, 'The Prime Minister is trying to defuse the situation').

Thus, one element of pragmatic competence is knowing how to perform a particular function or express an intention clearly. In order for communication to be successful, however, spoken or written messages must also be appropriate to the social context in which they are produced. Learners need to know the appropriate social conventions.

If it is the case that one language form can express a variety of functions, the converse is also true. A function can often be expressed in a variety of ways. Take these two responses to a telephone request:

If you'd kindly wait a moment, I'll see if he's able to talk to you.  
Hang on a minute, love, and I'll get him.

The first is highly formal and polite and might be said, for example, by a young clerk in a chamber of barristers to an elderly peer of the realm. On the other hand, the second is familiar, and might be said informally by one member of the family to another. The message is identical in both cases but the choice of vocabulary and structure depends on the setting, the relative status of the speakers, and their role-relationship. Some contemporary ELT coursebooks attempt to demonstrate this variation in style. For example, in the case of the set of requests presented in Materials extract 2.B, learners are encouraged to think about the conditions under which each phrase might occur. Through such activities learners build awareness of the relationship between language and the context of its use.

It can be seen, then, that social knowledge is necessary to select the language forms to use in different settings, and with people in different roles and with different status. This has also been called *sociolinguistic competence* (Bachman 1990). It can relate as much to non-verbal as to verbal communication. For example, a person accustomed in their own society to summon a waiter by clicking their fingers would meet with little success in many English-speaking cultures and would probably cause offence. It can also relate to knowing when to speak and when to be silent, or what to say in certain circumstances. Social small talk in some societies, but not in others, might allow guests at a party to ask what other people earn. Part of communicative

## Material: extract 2.B

**1 Polite formulas**

Asking for permission is a type of request.  
Grade the formulas below.

*	not very polite
**	polite
***	very polite
****	extremely polite

- ..... Could I use your phone?
- ..... Might I possibly use your phone?
- ..... Sorry to trouble you, but do you mind if I use your phone?
- ..... Would you mind if I used your phone?
- ..... May I use your phone?
- ..... I'll use your phone, OK?
- ..... Can I use your phone?
- ..... I wonder if I could use your phone.

(Viney and Viney: *Handshake* SB, page 68)

competence in a foreign language is knowing what is appropriate, what is incongruous, and what might cause offence.

In these ways, the sociolinguistic component of pragmatic competence enables a speaker to be 'contextually appropriate' or in Hymes's words, to know 'when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner' (1972: 277).

### 2.2.3 Discourse competence

Consider the following example. The teacher is asking her English class about the Great Storm of 1987 in Britain:

Teacher What did the hurricane do?

Of the responses, she commends Student D for a number of reasons.

Student A The hurricane uprooted the trees.

Student B The trees were uprooted.

Student C Hundreds of trees were uprooted by the hurricane.

Student D It uprooted hundreds of trees.

All of these responses are grammatically acceptable, but Students B and C put new information first, and as Widdowson (1978) points out, it is more normally the case in discourse that shared information (about the hurricane)

precedes new information (about its effects). Furthermore, Student D uses a reference item, 'It', as a cohesive device to relate the answer to the question and this fits in with the normal pattern of oral discourse. In this way, a unified spoken text is achieved.

Learners of English will need to become aware of how discourse works in terms of the common cohesive devices used in English. These can be demonstrated by working backwards in a conversation (Crystal and Davy 1969) between two speakers in which the final exchanges are:

B Well, it feels healthier, doesn't it?

A Yes.

B And seems healthier ...

A Yes.

B The theory is that they distract each other ... but that's life, isn't it?

(adapted from Crystal and Davy 1969: 102)

It is immediately apparent that this is taken from an ongoing conversation as the pronouns 'it', 'they', and 'each other' substitute for previous noun phrases or even whole situations described earlier in the conversation. The comparative 'healthier' used in a parallel structure shows both continuity of meaning and development of an earlier suggestion. Interpretation of the topic by a listener who came in at this point would be impossible. The exchanges preceding these give more clues but still the use of 'ones' has to be interpreted.

B ... it still tends to be true that most of the best ones are single sex ...

A Mm ...

B As far as I can gather ... best in terms of ... you know ...

A Records to show ...

B Yes ...

[ ... ]

A I can't see why because I'm convinced that mixed ones are the soundest ... I mean overall ... the soundest ...

(adapted from Crystal and Davy 1969: 101, 102)

A culturally aware listener, coming into the conversation here, might be able to interpret that the conversation is about schools, single sex and mixed ones, but many listeners would be lost if they had not heard the conversation from the beginning, where the mention of a single school starts the discussion.

This extract of authentic conversation between native speakers shows three other aspects of competence in conversational use of language: how to perform the turns in discourse; how to maintain the conversation; and how to develop the topic. Second language learners will need to acquire useful language for strategies such as initiating, entering, interrupting, checking,

and confirming in conversation. For example, they will need to learn the typical discourse markers which signal the direction of discourse such as 'By the way ...' (introducing an incidental remark); 'I'd like to take up an earlier point ...' (returning to consider an earlier argument), and 'That's all very well but ...' (challenging an argument).

Learners will also need to develop a similar kind of competence for written texts. For example, students reading technical English will have to follow the structure of different types of expository prose such as descriptions of processes, cause-effect analyses, and comparisons of systems. They will need to understand the relationships between the propositions of adjoining sentences and to interpret these relationships through formal devices, as in this example:

The population is ageing. That is to say, there is a higher percentage of people over the age of sixty than at any time previously this century.

Here, the second sentence is a reformulation of the proposition in the first and serves as an explanation. The connective 'That is to say' links the meaning of the two.

These various abilities needed to create coherent written texts or conversation, and to understand them, have together been termed *discourse competence* (Canale and Swain 1980; Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson 1984), or *textual competence* (Bachman 1990).

## 2.2.4 Strategic competence

Canale and Swain define *strategic competence* as 'how to cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open' (1980: 25). Strategic competence consists of using *communication strategies*. These strategies come into play when learners are unable to express what they want to say because they lack the resources to do so successfully. They compensate for this either by changing their original intention or by searching for other means of expression. For example, in this conversation between a native speaker of English and a Swedish student, it is possible to see a number of strategies at work.

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Student        | Every summer we go for a for ... , you know, erm, ...<br><i>fyrtion dagar</i> , ... um ... fourteen days ... a for ... I<br>mean ... |
| Native speaker | Oh, a fortnight.   |
| Student        | Yes, a fortnight. We go for a fortnight to our summer<br>stuga.  |
| Native speaker | What's that?   |



- Student** It's a small house in the country. It has, you know, a garden around it ... [gestures a circle to show an area of surrounding land]
- Native speaker** Oh, like a cottage, a country cottage ...

The Swedish student only half remembers the word 'fortnight' and doesn't know the word 'cottage'. In the first instance of 'fortnight' she uses the Swedish word and then gives a literal translation of it, 'fourteen days'. She continues with the paraphrase 'two weeks'. At the same time, she invites co-operation from her listener through the implicit appeal for help in 'you know' and 'I mean'. In the second instance, 'cottage', she code-switches to Swedish first then paraphrases, assisted by gesture, and again appeals for help with 'you know'. In summary, all of her strategies could be termed *achievement strategies*. She perseveres with what she is trying to say and finds ways of compensating for her insecure or inadequate knowledge of English.

This student's efforts can be compared with an example from the classroom. A Spanish student has been asked to make statements of probability to practise 'She might have ...', 'She could have ...', and 'She must have ...' about a picture of a sombre, black clad woman. The student ventures:

It's a picture of a woman. She ... I think she ... I think she is at a funeral. Perhaps her son has died. She is very sad.

This might be called a *reduction strategy* as she avoids the forms of which she is uncertain and selects the 'perhaps' structure which she knows.

The above examples demonstrate a number of strategies. Accounts of others can be found in Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson (1984) and Ellis (1985). Clearly the advantages of using achievement strategies or taking risks with the language is that they keep the conversation going and may encourage the listener to provide the necessary language. Second language acquisition research suggests that the exposure of learners to language provided at a point of need and in a meaningful context which they have created for themselves in trying to express something is a good situation for acquisition.

The question arising is whether strategic competence can be trained. Certainly teachers can help students early in a language programme by teaching them appropriate questions for requesting help, for example 'What does this mean?' and 'How do you say ...?', and the language to ask for vocabulary items, for example 'What do you call a person who ...?' and 'What do you call a thing that ...?'. The teacher can also act as listener in classroom interaction and respond to students' appeals for help, providing language at the point of need. There is little in current ELT materials, however, to suggest that learners receive much help in how to deal with problems themselves as they try to express themselves in English. Strategy training is an issue which needs to be further addressed in ELT.

### 2.2.5 Fluency

The term 'fluency' relates to language production and it is normally reserved for speech. It is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or undue hesitation. Faerch, Hastrup, and Phillipson include fluency as a component of communicative competence and distinguish it from strategic competence in this way:

Whereas strategic competence presupposes a lack of [accessible] knowledge, fluency covers speakers' ability to make use of whatever linguistic and pragmatic competence they have (Faerch, Hastrup, and Phillipson 1984: 168).

They list three types of fluency:

- semantic fluency*: linking together propositions and speech acts
  - lexical-syntactic fluency*: linking together syntactic constituents and words
  - articulatory fluency*: linking together speech segments.
- (ibid.: 143)

These types can be appreciated in the following extract from a conversation:

- A When will you be taking your driving test?  
 B The day after my birthday.  
 A And when's your birthday? Remind me.  
 B September 27th.

The purpose of A's question is to find out the exact date of B's driving test so that she can send a good luck card. B's answer mistakenly assumes that A knows the date of his birthday. A therefore has to listen, assess that she does not get the information she wants, and formulate another question which will elicit more precise information from which she can deduce the date of the test. This ability to respond coherently within the turns of the conversation, to link the words and phrases of the questions; to pronounce the sounds clearly with appropriate stress and intonation, and to do all of this quickly, in what Johnson (1979) calls 'real time', is what constitutes fluency.

ELT has addressed the issue of how to develop fluency in various ways. Coursebooks in the 1970s often contained fluency drills, but these were aimed solely at increasing the learner's ability to link syntactic segments with ease. For example, the teacher would set up a chain drill and provide each student with a different prompt which they would have to insert in the correct syntactic position, as in:

- Students I went to the theatre last night.  
 Teacher My aunt's house.  
 Student 1 I went to my aunt's house last night.  
 Teacher Visited.  
 Student 2 I visited my aunt's house last night.  
 Teacher Yesterday.

More recently, teachers have debated whether it is possible to teach gambits to help learners become more fluent, particularly learners who need to use English in their community or in their profession and who need to keep the attention of their listeners. We use gambits in a meeting when we want to hold the floor, for example, 'I'd just like to make another quick point'; to interrupt, for example 'Can I just come in here', or to respond, for example 'I agree with that in part but ...'.

The idea of teaching gambits fits well with insights from recent research into what Nattinger (1988) has called 'lexical phrases'. These are items of prefabricated language, learned holistically as chunks, and include not only phrases but clauses and sentences too, as in the examples above. Nattinger suggests that this kind of lexical learning plays a much stronger role in language learning than previously appreciated. The advantage of teaching lexical phrases is that, if they can be retrieved quickly from memory, they will help learners to produce the language more fluently.

Certainly, practice activities in spoken English will need to involve learners in interpreting and assessing the meaning of what they hear and constructing appropriate responses independently of language input from the teacher or textbook. This implies activities in which students will determine the content of what they say in interaction with other students.

### 2.3 *What are the issues for the communicative curriculum?*

Having considered those aspects of communicative language ability which have been defined and explored over recent years, the question then arises of how the ELT profession has responded to the significant implications for teaching and learning a language. A list of such implications could be formulated as in Table 2.1, though this list is by no means exhaustive and teachers might add to each category items which they feel are of especial importance for their own learners. The remaining sections of this chapter will take up the key implications from this list and others will be considered in the relevant chapters of this book.

*Table 2.1: Significant implications of communicative language ability for teaching and learning*

If communicative language ability consists of the following ...	... what does this imply for language learners?
Linguistic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to achieve accuracy in the grammatical forms of the language</li> <li>- to pronounce the forms accurately</li> <li>- to use stress, rhythm, and intonation to express meaning</li> <li>- to build a range of vocabulary</li> <li>- to learn the script and spelling rules</li> <li>- to achieve accuracy in syntax and word formation.</li> </ul>
Pragmatic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to learn the relationship between grammatical forms and functions</li> <li>- to use stress and intonation to express attitude and emotion</li> <li>- to learn the scale of formality</li> <li>- to understand and use emotive tone</li> <li>- to use the pragmatic rules of language</li> <li>- to select language forms appropriate to topic, listener, etc.</li> </ul>
Discourse competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to take longer turns, use discourse markers, and open and close conversations</li> <li>- to appreciate and be able to produce contextualized written texts in a variety of genres</li> <li>- to be able to use cohesive devices in reading and writing texts</li> <li>- to be able to cope with authentic texts.</li> </ul>
Strategic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to be able to take risks in using both spoken and written language</li> <li>- to use a range of communication strategies</li> <li>- to learn the language needed to engage in some of these strategies, e.g. 'What do you call a thing that/person who ...'.</li> </ul>
Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to deal with the information gap of real discourse</li> <li>- to process language and respond appropriately with a degree of ease</li> <li>- to be able to respond with reasonable speed in 'real time'.</li> </ul>

## 2.4 What are the implications for the communicative classroom?

### 2.4.1 *What are communicative tasks and what are their roles in teaching and learning?*

The communicative approach to language teaching is premised on the belief that, if the development of communicative language ability is the goal of classroom learning, then communicative practice must be part of the process. Not everyone would agree with this 'product implies process' argument. There are certainly successful language learners, not least among English language teachers, who have come through an ELT curriculum where the focus has been on a study of the formal system of English and where classroom practice has been less than interactive. However, it is the current orthodoxy demonstrated in learner materials around the world and the debate of recent years has pivoted on the issue of exactly what kind of practice will lead to the development of communicative language ability. Brumfit (1984a), for example, argues for 'natural language use' and suggests the need for what he calls 'fluency activities'. We need to avoid possible confusion here as he uses the term 'fluency' in a different sense from Faerch, Haastруп, and Phillipson (1984). In his definition, fluency activities 'develop a pattern of language interaction within the classroom which is as close as possible to that used by competent performers in the mother tongue in real life' (Brumfit 1984a: 69). He lists a set of criteria necessary for achieving fluency. These have been simultaneously developed and expanded by other writers and can be summarized as follows:

- The language should be a means to an end, i.e. the focus should be on the meaning and not on the form. Other writers have made similar distinctions, for example 'message/medium' (Krashen 1982) and 'unfocused/focused' (Ellis 1982).
- The content should be determined by the learner who is speaking or writing. The learner has to formulate and produce ideas, information, opinions, etc.
- There must be a negotiation of meaning between the speakers, i.e. students must be involved in interpreting a meaning from what they hear and constructing what to say as a response. In other words, they should not be reliant on the teacher or materials to provide the language. This criterion clearly brings into play pragmatic and discourse competences as well as fluency.
- In order for the previous criterion to function, what a learner hears should not be predictable, i.e. there should be an information or opinion gap.

- The normal processes of listening, reading, speaking, and writing will be in play; for example improvising and paraphrasing in speech; in other words, students will practise and develop strategic competence.
- Teacher intervention to correct should be minimal as this distracts from the message.

In Brumfit's view, fluency activities will give students the opportunity to produce and understand items which they have gradually acquired during activities focused on linguistic form, which he calls 'accuracy work'.

Much ELT material has taken up the concept of fluency activities and presents tasks which conform to the criteria above, for example the activity in Materials extract 2.C. The aims of this activity are that in performing this task students' attention would be on the meanings they are trying to express as they think of their list of criteria. They are able to use any language resources they have acquired and are not directed into using particular structures. Members of the group would determine their own contributions and choose appropriate language for expressing ideas and opinions. They would negotiate meaning as they structure group interaction, checking that they have understood, asking for clarification and further explanation, and as they speak they would use communication strategies such as paraphrase and restructuring.

At this point you may wish to review the Introductory task to this chapter and the criteria you developed for a communicative activity. That activity and Klippel's both demonstrate the difficult task for materials designers in providing activities for the communicative classroom. One issue of great interest has been how to create the 'gap' of information or opinion which exists between speakers in the real world, and which creates the unpredictability of normal discourse. What kind of activity requires learners to negotiate meaning? Prabhu (1987) gives a useful typology of activities which have formed the basis of much contemporary material:

- 1 *Information-gap activity*, which involves a transfer of given information from one person to another—or from one form to another, or from one place to another—generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. One example is pair work in which each member of the pair has a part of the total information (for example an incomplete picture) and attempts to convey it verbally to the other. Another example is completing a tabular representation with information available in a given piece of text. The activity often involves selection of relevant information as well, and learners may have to meet criteria of completeness and correctness in making the transfer.

## Materials extract 2.C

<b>93 Rescue</b>	
<b>Aims</b>	<p><b>Skills</b> – speaking</p> <p><b>Language</b> –stating an opinion, giving and asking for reasons, agreeing and disagreeing, comparisons</p> <p><b>Other</b> – thinking about one's values</p>
<b>Level</b>	Intermediate/advanced
<b>Organisation</b>	Groups of five to eight students
<b>Preparation</b>	None
<b>Time</b>	10–20 minutes
<b>Procedure</b>	<p><b>Step 1:</b> The teacher explains the situation:            'The Earth is doomed. All life is going to perish in two days due to radiation. A spaceship from another solar system lands and offers to rescue twelve people, who could start a new world on an empty planet very much like Earth. Imagine you are the selection committee and you have to decide who may be rescued. Think of a list of criteria which you would use in your decision.'</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> Each group discusses the problem and tries to work out a list.</p> <p><b>Step 3:</b> Each group presents its list of criteria to the class. The lists are discussed.</p>
<b>Variations</b>	The task can be made more specific, e.g. 'Find ten criteria. You can award up to 100 points if a candidate gets full marks on all counts, e.g. appearance 5, intelligence 30, fertility 15, physical fitness 20, etc.
<b>Remarks</b>	Although the basic problem is a rather depressing one, it helps students to clarify their own values as regards judging others.

(Klippel: *Keep Talking*, page 104)

- Reasoning-gap activity*, which involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns. One example is working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables. Another is deciding what course of action is best (for example cheapest or quickest) for a given purpose and within given constraints. The activity necessarily involves comprehending and conveying information, as an information-gap activity, but the information to be conveyed is not identical with that initially comprehended. There is a piece of reasoning which connects the two.
- Opinion-gap activity*, which involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. One example is story completion; another is taking part in the discussion of a social issue. The activity may involve using factual information and

formulating arguments to justify one's opinion, but there is no objective procedure for demonstrating outcomes as right or wrong, and no reason to expect the same outcome from different individuals or on different occasions.

(Prabhu 1987: 46-7)

You might review the activities in this chapter, and others in coursebooks, to find examples of each type.

The introduction of such activities into ELT has generated creative materials in all four modes of language use: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It has also generated a number of issues which are the focus of current debate. The fundamental issue is how learners actually use the activities they are provided with in order to acquire language, and whether different ways of exploiting activities provide different opportunities for learning. Skehan (1996), for example, has pointed out that in performing a task under time pressure, learners may place greater emphasis on communicating messages in order to complete the task quickly and may not therefore pay much attention to correctness and completeness of language form. They may use communication strategies or string lexical phrases together to express ideas. Negotiation of meaning in such tasks will provide for the development of greater strategic competence and fluency, as described in 2.2, but will not necessarily lead to more comprehensible output and the development of greater accuracy. There is a danger, in fact, that learners may develop what Skehan calls 'undesirable fluency' (*ibid.*, page 49) with the use of convenient but incorrect forms which they then make use of in other tasks.

We need, then, to ask the question, what will help learners to become more accurate? For example, if we take away the time pressure in a task like the one in Materials extract 2.C and give learners a chance to prepare the content of what they are going to say, they may focus more on correct expression. Alternatively, an opportunity to focus on form may be provided after the communicative task if students are recorded and then try to compare their own language for justifying the criteria with forms the teacher gives them. Similarly, in writing classes there is the useful technique of reformulation where the teacher rewrites one student's text after the class has completed a common writing task, following the ideas closely but improving the language. The class compares the two versions, discussing reasons for the changes made. In this case, learners have a chance to notice differences between their own use of language forms and those of the teacher, and can pay attention to the correct forms. This provides opportunities for intake and the further development of the learners' interlanguage systems. It is therefore possible, in the case of using a cycle of preparatory and follow-up tasks, to create a balance between accuracy and fluency activity.



An understanding of how learners use tasks can inform our decision-making about how to incorporate them into a language teaching programme. There is an argument that a series of tasks can usefully provide the basis of a programme, in which case their selection, organization, and sequencing will need to create opportunities for a focus on accuracy and input into the interlanguage system as well as fluency. Alternatively, many teachers and textbook writers see communicative tasks as an essential ingredient in a programme but as part of a balanced diet of accuracy and fluency work. Brumfit (1984a), for example, sees these as co-existing but suggests that the balance would change over time. His suggestion is that one might expect to find a preponderance of accuracy-based work early on, for beginners, but that there would be a gradual shift in emphasis as learners acquire more language and that upper-intermediate learners might be involved for a high proportion of class time in fluency work.

The issue of exactly how we might create a link between the two is still the subject of much debate. Clearly, it raises questions about the role of grammar and other elements of the formal language system in the communicative classroom. As suggested earlier, linguistic competence is a fundamental component of communicative language ability and it has perhaps been a misconception among teachers that the communicative approach somehow excuses teachers and learners from a consideration of how to develop high levels of accuracy in the use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. On the contrary, it is rather a question of how to develop communicative language ability through classroom practice but, at the same time, to ensure an understanding of how language works as a system and to develop an ability to use the system correctly, appropriately, and creatively.

Teachers and textbook designers have been preoccupied with how to integrate input on language form, rehearsal of language form, and communicative practice. The 'Presentation, Practice, and Production' (PPP) approach was one attempt to achieve integration. At the presentation stage, the teacher presents a new language item, described functionally to help learners to appreciate its communicative purpose. This can be seen in Materials extract 5.D (page 165) where learners are presented with the future with 'going to' in the context of making holiday plans. The practice stage involves controlled work focused on conditional forms as students write questions for a quiz, and the production phase aims to set up a situation in which the structure would naturally occur, as in the discussion of future government policy. Unfortunately, it has been the experience of many teachers that it is very difficult to control the language which can occur naturally in such activities. Students will use whatever language resources they have at their command and may use reduction strategies to avoid using any forms they are uncertain of. Directing their attention to the form in

efforts to persuade them to practise it while they are focused on the messages they are trying to communicate to their peers is distracting and counter-productive in terms of fluency. Various alternatives to the PPP approach have been suggested in the attempt to deal with the issue of integration and will be taken up in Chapter 10.

### 2.4.2 *How can we manage a communicative classroom?*

As we have seen, many communicative tasks involve learners in face-to-face encounters in the classroom. Interaction in work in small groups, as discussed in 1.2.3, provides a basis for language acquisition. It also gives students practice in communicating and negotiating meanings in establishing positive rapport, in maintaining a conversation with appropriate turn-taking conventions and, at the same time, allows them to establish how well they can understand and make themselves understood. In lessons where reading and writing are the focus of communicative activity, work in small groups also has substantial value. For example, if students collaborate while revising drafts of writing, they can suggest improvements, correct errors, and generally act as editors while reading each other's work.

Teachers will need to consider carefully the demands made on learners by participation in this type of interaction, and to be aware of the socio-psychological factors which influence learner responses to those demands. Adults returning to English language study after experiencing traditional teacher-fronted classrooms at school can be daunted by the collaborative element of learning. There are implications here for talking about methodology, discussing its rationale, negotiating procedures, and introducing unfamiliar activities gradually.

Building cohesiveness within the group is clearly an important managerial role for the teacher. It can be at least partially achieved through attention to seating arrangements, through a progressive introduction of interaction activities from simple pairwork on a short task to more complex role-play activities, through training learners in peer feedback, and through careful management of group size.

The composition of groups is another consideration, one which assumes increasing importance as groupwork moves into the kind of teamwork required for projects or for the preparation of complex simulations. Here the teacher will need to make decisions about whether to allocate roles within the group such as chair, scribe, spokesperson, and timekeeper, or whether to let members of the group decide these among themselves. Insights are available from work in professions other than ELT where the dynamics of

groupwork need careful thought. For example, it is generally acknowledged that each group will pass through a number of stages in which members discover the personalities of colleagues, organize themselves, argue about working methods and/or authority within the group, settle down into cohesiveness, and begin to perform usefully. These stages have been called 'forming', 'storming', 'norming', and 'performing' (Tuckman and Jensen 1977). One issue for the teacher is whether to keep the same groups together over a period of time on a course to allow the process of group formation to be successfully completed. Another issue is whether this process can be facilitated simply by using ice-breaking activities at the beginning of a course as groups form. An alternative would be to invite learners, after tasks have been completed, to review the procedures they have used and to improve on them.

Another perception suggests that, for a group to be effective in completing a task, it needs at least one member who is interested in keeping the group on task and achieving a useful outcome, and one member who will be interested in maintaining good relationships within the group. This will ensure that a variety of functions are catered for; those which assist the task such as suggesting ideas or asking for opinions and those which build cohesiveness such as drawing in quieter members or making compromises between different points of view (Johnson and Johnson 1987; Jacques 1991). Further issues for the teacher, then, are how to select group members and how to raise awareness of the need to perform these roles, and what kind of language might be needed. In many professional fields it is now standard practice to train for groupwork and similar ideas are being taken up in ELT.

A communicative classroom also involves the teacher in a wider range of roles beyond that of providing and presenting new language. A good deal of time will be spent on managing learning: setting up activities, organizing material resources, guiding students in groupwork, encouraging contributions, monitoring activities, and diagnosing the further needs of students. The range of roles can be demonstrated by analysing the stages of groupwork in the jigsaw reading and discussion activity in Materials extract 2.D. Notice that at stages 3 and 5 in Table 2.2, while monitoring groupwork, the teacher acts as guide to performing the task successfully; as a language resource providing words and forms at the point of need; as corrector of key errors heard as the students work together; and as diagnoser of the students' strengths and weaknesses.

## Materials extract 2.D

Figure 33 Jigsaw procedure

## Card for Group A

<p style="text-align: right;">Fri. 1st Aug.</p> <p>Dear Mum and Dad,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">We arrived</p> <p>this morning at a very nice camp site. It is between the railway and the road, but it is quiet. There are only two trains a day, and not much traffic! From our tent we can see the Barton rail bridge, with Barton behind it, then the mountains. It's a lovely view.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X X Sue</p>	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto 20px auto;"></div> <p>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Smith 13, Belmont Drive Reading, RG9 7BD</p>
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## Card for Group B

<p style="text-align: right;">Sun 2nd Aug.</p> <p>Dear Anne,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">We are camping</p> <p>next to a mountain. It's very nice but in the early morning the whole camp site is in the shade of this mountain! It's called the Grey Mountain. Yesterday we climbed to the top, and had a lovely view of Barton and the River Maddock to the north. See you soon (we're leaving tomorrow)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sue</p>	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto 20px auto;"></div> <p>Annie Williams 3 Green Lane Reading RG1 7ZF</p>
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## Card for Group C

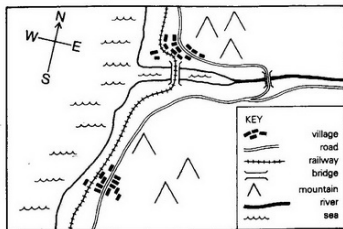
<p style="text-align: right;">Mon 4/8</p> <p>Dear Mum and Dad,</p> <p>We left our camp site just outside Lugwill this morning and have arrived in Barton, the next village north. We came by bus over the Maddock Bridge. It was a very nice journey. Last Saturday we went on a long walk, but yesterday we sun-bathed. The weather's lovely.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Hope you are well</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Love Liz</p>	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto 20px auto;"></div> <p>Mr. and Mrs Gunner 21 Humbledown Road Reading RG19 2ZQ</p>
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## WORKSHEET

## Part One

Read your copy of the postcard and:

- 1 Label as much of the map as you can.



- 2 Fill in as much of the table as you can.

Date	What did the girls do?
Friday 1st August	
Saturday 2nd August	
Sunday 3rd August	
Monday 4th August	

- 3 Think of a possible place for the girls' camp site, but do not mark it on your map yet.

## Part Two

- 1 Form new groups with at least one person from groups A, B and C and exchange your information. You can then label more of your map and complete the table.
- 2 Discuss the possible position of the camp site and mark it on your map.

*Table 2.2: Analysis of the stages of groupwork in the activity in Materials extract 2.D*

Stages of the task	Learner activity	Teacher's role
1 Teacher explains task and invites questions	Students listen and ask questions to clarify	Manager of activity
2 Teacher organizes students into groups	Students move into groups	Classroom organizer
3 Students work in groups to read postcard, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual reading</li> <li>- Checking meaning with peers</li> <li>- Discussion of information</li> <li>- Decisions about map and table</li> </ul>	Guide Language resource Corrector of errors Monitor Diagnoser
4 Teacher organizes students into triads, each of the three members having read a different postcard	Students move into new groups	Classroom organizer
5 Students exchange information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each student reports</li> <li>- Students complete maps and tables</li> <li>- Students discuss location of campsite</li> </ul>	Guide Language resource Corrector of errors Monitor Diagnoser
6 Class and teacher check	Students give feedback as the teacher elicits	Corrector of errors Evaluator

It is not surprising that some teachers feel intimidated by the demands of their task within the communicative classroom. Dubin and Olshtain (1986) have likened it to that of a stage director:

Just as the theater director plays a pivotal role in sustaining the fiction of a stage drama, so the teacher/director uses the classroom stage to simulate the real world. ...

On a human level, the director makes personal connections between the scenario and each of the players, helping each one to understand the script, and interpreting parts that are unclear. The director, too, provides strong psychological support by being an individual and a group morale booster.

(Dubin and Olshtain 1986: 81)

Teachers need to build competence and confidence in fulfilling these various roles, and in-service training is necessary within institutions to ensure that, in any moves towards implementing communicative approaches in the classroom, teachers are properly supported.

All of this is not to suggest that current methodology, influenced by ideas about the 'learner-centred' classroom, promotes learner responsibility at the expense of teacher authority. Whatever the moves in recent years towards placing greater responsibility upon learners and encouraging their independence, adult learners who choose to work with other students in language classes place themselves within the authority of teachers, and institutions require accountability from their staff. The teacher remains the ultimate organizer of activity, the one who must ensure positive learning outcomes for students, the one accountable to any external authority involved, and the arbiter of standards. Widdowson (1987) takes this view when he writes:

The increase in learner-centred activity and collaborative work in the classroom does not mean that the teacher becomes less authoritative. He or she still has to contrive the required enabling conditions for learning, has still to monitor and guide progress. And all this presupposes an expertise, applied perhaps with more subtlety and consideration and discretion than before, but applied none the less. (Widdowson 1987: 87)

### 2.4.3 *What does communicative language teaching imply for authenticity in the classroom?*

With communicative language teaching has come pressure to use authentic materials, in other words, materials which have not been designed especially for language learners and which therefore do not have contrived or simplified language. The argument is quite simply that if the goal of teaching is to equip students to deal ultimately with the authentic language of the real world, they should be given opportunities to cope with this in the classroom. It has been argued that contrived listening texts, in particular, have characteristics which in no way approximate to real spoken language. This is discussed in greater detail in 7.3.5. If students hear only unnatural language in the classroom, their first experience of hearing authentic spoken English in the real world can be demoralizing. The classroom, it is argued, can provide supported conditions of learning in which authentic texts can gradually be introduced and exploited in ways which build confidence.

Communicative methodology has displayed an increasing tendency to use authentic materials in relation to listening and reading skills. A brief review

of contemporary coursebooks at the intermediate level shows the following range:

**Listening** radio plays, news items, childrens' stories, travel news, weather forecasts, airport and station announcements, radio talks, debates, extracts from recorded guided tours, relaxation tapes, exercise instructions, interviews

**Reading** letters, recipes, menus, newspaper articles, train timetables, horoscopes, advertisements, publicity brochures, postcards, street maps, route maps, yearbook entries, weather forecasts, curricula vitae, theatre programmes, poems, instructions for use of equipment.

Speaking and writing activities can also be referred to as authentic if they reflect the relevant criteria for task design discussed earlier (see 2.4.1) and also mirror the real-world purposes and situations in which and for which language is used. For example, writing tasks which reflect reasons for writing outside the English language classroom might include the following:

- a note to a neighbour apologizing for a noisy party
- a letter of complaint about a product to the manufacturer
- a notice to fellow students publicizing a meeting
- an invitation to a birthday party with directions for how to get there.

The use of authentic materials for work on the receptive skills of reading and listening has been surrounded by controversy. On the one hand, writers like Grellet (1981) advocate the use of texts in which nothing has been changed. On the other, many teachers would argue that the needs of learners at lower levels of proficiency demand the use of 'simulated-authentic' materials. These emulate original materials, but are contrived in some way to assist the learner. For example, the overall structure of a comparison/contrast argument can be highlighted by adding connectives such as 'whereas', 'while', 'on the contrary', 'on the other hand', and 'in comparison'. Presenting learners—for whom the building of confidence is all important—with texts which they can approach successfully is seen as the common-sense approach. It is a question of providing texts which are authentic to the needs of learners, ones with which they can interact. Widdowson (1979b), for example, argues that authenticity can only be achieved when the reader can interpret the intentions of the writer and respond appropriately to them. His argument has implications not only for the language level of the text but for the prior knowledge a learner will bring to reading or listening to it, and whether that knowledge will be sufficient for successful interpretation. For example, a learner with a passion for cars may well make sense of a book on car maintenance written at a level of English above that of his own proficiency simply because he has a good prior



knowledge of the topic. On the other hand, as an English language advisor once commented to me, there is little to be gained from presenting schoolchildren in rural Mexico with a map of the London underground system and expecting them to make sense of a task to find their way from one point on it to another.

The keys to approaching a text successfully lie in the relevance of the text to the learners, its interest, the experience they can bring to making sense of it, and the appropriacy of the task required. Quite difficult texts can be made accessible through simple but appropriate tasks. For example, a weather forecast from a national newspaper might be used as part of a project with lower-intermediate students visiting the UK. They could be asked to check the forecast for the area in which they are staying and use the information to plan some weekend activities. This would approximate to the authentic purpose of reading a weather report. To give the same students a traditional set of comprehension questions about the weather forecast in order to practise weather vocabulary or structural patterns would be both inauthentic and probably above their language level.

The selection of authentic texts will, of course, depend on the particular needs of the learners in view. Pre-session courses for overseas students will ideally confront students with genuine texts of the type they will shortly have to deal with independently in their undergraduate studies. Preparatory courses for summer visitors to English-speaking countries can usefully present a range of authentic texts and tasks related to the role of tourist abroad. For secondary-school students of English, the scope of whose future opportunities to use the language in real-life contexts is uncertain, it is possible to argue for building 'communicative potential', but only through the judicious choice and exploitation of texts which are 'authentic' in the ways described above.

## 2.5 What are the issues in applying a communicative approach in context?

Particular attention has been paid in recent years to the cultural appropriacy of the communicative approach (Holliday 1994; Kramsch and Sullivan 1996) as its goals and procedures have been imported into non-western cultures. 'Cultural appropriacy' is a term which is relevant to both institutions such as schools and the wider society which forms their context. For example, a school culture of teacher-centred classrooms with a focus on the transmission of knowledge will have been influenced in part by wider cultural notions of the teacher's authority as expert and leader.

Studies of innovation suggest that it is rarely successful unless a set of factors have been carefully addressed: for example, the degree of compatibility between the existing teaching philosophy and the innovation; teachers' perceptions of its relevance to students' needs; the availability of resources for the innovation; the extent of agreement between the classroom procedures of the new approach and the existing way in which teachers conduct classroom activities, and the relative advantages of the innovation. All of these factors will influence the extent to which a communicative approach is adopted by teachers and the ways in which it is adjusted.

For example, in Rufino's account of his teaching situation at the beginning of Chapter 1, project work clearly fits with his perceptions of the value of learner-centred teaching and with his view of the needs of this age group to develop responsibility. He is able to relate project work to the real world outside the classroom and sees advantages in this as English is a useful language within the European community, which his pupils may wish to travel and work in. Project work is also manageable within the constraints of class size and the demands of the examination system. The picture might be very different in Bangladesh or Botswana, for example.

The question of teacher confidence is also relevant to the argument of appropriacy. The adoption of a communicative approach holds substantial implications for the knowledge and skills of teachers. Medyges, for example, comments on the heavy linguistic demands made by communicative language teaching on non-native teachers whose energy is 'inevitably used up in the constant struggle with their own language deficiencies, leaving only a small fraction for attending to their students' problems' (1986: 112). His argument is essentially for restraint in introducing communicative language teaching to non-native teachers, selecting the more moderate ideas for materials and methodology and being cautious with the more far-fetched. The interpretation of what is moderate and what is far-fetched can only really be made with reference to the factors relating to innovation discussed above as they apply to a particular local context.

In many countries, the implications of the discussion so far are rather more relevant to educational authorities than to the individual teacher, who may be working with prescribed textbooks and with imposed and inspected classroom procedures. However, there is evidence to suggest that teachers who have more freedom in decision-making and who see value in a communicative approach, either because its goals coincide with their learners' needs or because they see value in the kinds of activities it offers, can adjust the approach to suit their own circumstances.

Sano, Takahashi, and Yoneyama (1984), to quote one instance, have argued that in Japanese secondary-school classrooms the need to use English is not

strongly felt because it does not have an extensive role in Japanese society. For this reason, teachers have redirected their communicative goals towards self-expression and personal growth in students rather than towards authentic communicative needs in the world outside the classroom.

By regarding the classroom as a small community and emphasizing the *subjective* side of human communication, we can provide classroom experiences which involve both learning English and general human development.  
(Sano, Takahashi, and Yoneyama 1984: 176)

Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) give a further example of how the cultural tradition in Vietnam of students forming 'family groups' with peers in their classes at university has had its own effect on the use of groupwork. Teachers and students using communicative materials such as the *Headway* course will adapt the methodology advocated in creative ways to suit their need to work collaboratively but as a whole class. These examples show how teachers and learners have found an optimal match between communicative goals and procedures, and their own context. They provide interesting argument and support for locally generated methodology.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Communicative language teaching sets out to involve learners in purposeful tasks which are embedded in meaningful contexts and which reflect and rehearse language as it is used authentically in the world outside the classroom. It holds many attractions, not only to those teachers and learners who are preparing for immediate needs in using English but also for a wider population of teachers and learners who are motivated by realistic language practice, by the personalization of learning, by face-to-face encounters in the classroom, and by using their prior knowledge and heuristic skills to approach a wide range of texts and tasks.

However, there are matters of concern to be addressed. One is to do with our need for better understanding of what learners do with communicative tasks and what kinds of learning are available from different types of exploitation of tasks. Another is to do with what is appropriate for different levels of learner. At what point should learners be involved in tasks which encourage them to take risks and negotiate meaning? Should the basic building blocks of the language be learned within the more 'secure' environment of a structural approach in a largely teacher-directed classroom? What is the role of form-focused instruction at different levels of the English language curriculum?

A further concern is to do with the concept of 'communicative' materials, the meaning of authenticity, and the issues involved in the choice of listening and reading texts, the choice of tasks to match texts and, indeed, the choice of language to express common functions in the English language. A brief review of coursebooks in current use would show that these issues are better understood by some writers than others, particularly in the area of matching task to text.

And, last but not least, there is the issue of whether a communicative approach is appropriate to local contexts and cultures, and how it might be adapted and used by teachers and learners in relevant ways.

These issues are at the forefront of professional debate and need to be resolved in sensible ways by teachers who wish to make their own classrooms more communicative. They will be revisited in further chapters of this book as we consider some of the prevailing classroom procedures within a communicative approach in the light of insights available from research, evaluation, and experience.

### *Discussion topics and projects*

- Imagine a context in which each of these utterances would be appropriate. Think about a possible setting, who is talking to whom, and what their relationship is, for example, family member, friend, or stranger.
  - Will you be passing the post office?
  - Lend us a fiver, will you?
  - I wonder if it would be too much trouble for you to lift my bag down for me?
  - 'Well, I *really* never,' said the large and growly bear to himself. 'There must be *someone* I can frighten.' And so he went growling and prowling, looking for someone to frighten.
  - Johnny, why are you playing with that ruler?
- How many structures can you think of to express these functions?
  - suggesting a course of action
  - agreeing with an opinion
  - requesting an action
  - asking permission to do something
- Look back at the characteristics of a communicative task in 2.4.1. Choose some activities in a textbook you are currently using and, against the given criteria, judge whether these are communicative.

- 4 Look back at Prabhu's descriptions for three types of meaning-focused activity in the classroom in 2.4.1. Check through a coursebook in current use and find examples of each one.
- 5 Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) give the following suggestions for teaching two aspects of strategic competence. Would you use these with your own learners? Can you think of other ways of training strategic competence?

*Paraphrase and circumlocution: Definitions*

In pairs, students are given the name of an object (e.g. car) which they must define by using a relative clause (e.g. 'A car is a vehicle in which you can travel'). Each pair in turn reads out their definition, while the other pairs check whether it is precise enough. If it is not—that is, if they can find another object that the definition suits (e.g. 'bus' in this case) they get a point, and for another point they must give a more specific definition (e.g. 'A car is a small vehicle in which you can travel'). Of course, this new definition is also open to debate.

*Appealing for help: Interruptions*

Student 1 (S1) reads out a text from the course book; Student 2 (S2) interrupts S1, asking him/her to repeat a word again, for example:

S1 London is the capital ...

S2 Sorry, can you repeat this last word again ...

or Sorry, I couldn't hear the word after 'the' ...

(Dörnyei and Thurrell 1991: 21, 22)

- 6 The following reasons are often given for using pairwork and groupwork in the communicative classroom. Do you agree with these? Would you add any from your own experience? What do you think are the disadvantages of pairwork and work in small groups. Would you place any conditions on their successful use in the classroom?
  - (a) It motivates students to work in face to face encounters in the classroom.
  - (b) It increases opportunities for practising the language.
  - (c) It enables students to take risks with the language and to see if they can negotiate meaning.
  - (d) It gives students the opportunity to monitor how well they understand and are understood.

### **Further reading**

Clarke, D. 1989b. 'Communicative theory and its influence on materials production.' *Language Teaching* 22/2: 73–86.

This 'state of the art' article looks at how the development of a communicative approach to language teaching in the 1970s led to the production of new materials to express the new ideas of language learning. In particular, the author focuses on the authenticity debate and discusses the needs of learners, the importance of context in materials, the appropriacy of task to text, and the authenticity of task to learner.

Nunan, D. 1989a. *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book gives an introduction to both theoretical and practical aspects of task design and is useful to teachers who wish to develop their own classroom materials. It covers the range of skills and considers the roles that teachers and learners can play in the performance of a classroom task. It also looks at criteria which could be used for grading tasks to form a coherent language programme.

Richards, J. C. and T. S. Rodgers. 1986. Chapter 5 'Communicative language teaching' in J. C. Richards and T. S. Rodgers (eds.): *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This is a clear, concise introduction to what is meant by communicative language teaching. The writers give a brief historical background to its development and investigate the theories of language and learning which underly the approach. They then consider a series of issues: the nature of a communicative syllabus; types of classroom activity; teacher and learner roles; the role of materials, and classroom management procedures.

Savignon, S. 1993. 'Communicative language teaching: state of the art' in S. Silberstein (ed.): *State of the Art TESOL Essays*. Alexandria, Va.: TESOL.

This paper reviews the development of communicative language teaching and then looks at current issues of concern, such as the place of grammar, and possible future trends. The review takes an international perspective and refers to many different sources of influence and contexts of learning.

# 3

## LEARNER AUTONOMY AND LEARNER TRAINING

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*'If a teacher is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.'*

KAHLIL GIBRAN

- 1 What do we know about the strategies of the good language learner?
- 2 What insights can we gain from educational thinking on autonomous learning?
- 3 What are the implications for learner training in the classroom?
- 4 What role can self-access facilities play in language learning?
- 5 Are learner autonomy and learner training universally appropriate concepts?

### *Introductory task*

The task below is intended for use at the beginning of a course. It could be undertaken in English with students from an intermediate level of language proficiency upwards, or in the first language with students at lower levels.

- 1 What do you think are the aims of the task?
- 2 What sort of learners do you think it would be suitable for?
- 3 What would be a sensible procedure for its classroom use?

A In your textbook find:

- the past tense of the verb 'to fly'
- what we use the past tense for
- how to ask questions about the weather
- how to ask about someone's health
- how to pronounce the word 'tomato'.

B Do you expect the textbook to:

- teach you?
- contain all the language you need?

- be a starting point?
- provide exercises?
- provide grammar?
- be a dictionary?
- be open throughout your lessons?
- be the only material you use?
- give your teacher all he/she needs?
- give you ways of assessing your progress?
- enable you to prepare new lessons in advance?
- summarize everything you learn so that you can revise at home?

### 3.1 Introduction: the self-directed learner

During a course in the late 1970s, I asked a group of English language teachers from around the world to define what the term 'self-directed learning' meant for them. At the time very little had been published specifically in ELT literature on aspects of learner autonomy or learner training. Their definitions ranged from the tentative: 'It means letting students choose their own topics and activities for homework', to the passionate: 'It means students' emancipation from the hands of teachers', and to the reflective: 'A self-directed learner is one who is self-motivated, one who takes the initiative, one who has a clear idea of what he wants to learn, and one who has his own plan for pursuing and achieving his goal.' In fact, from the definitions offered by this group and others in the intervening years, it is possible to build a picture of teachers' perceptions of the self-directed learner. Self-directed learners:

- 'know their needs and work productively with the teacher towards the achievement of their objectives'
- 'learn both inside and outside the classroom'
- 'can take classroom-based material and can build on it'
- 'know how to use resources independently'
- 'learn with active thinking'
- 'adjust their learning strategies when necessary to improve learning'
- 'manage and divide the time in learning properly'
- 'don't think the teacher is a god who can give them ability to master the language'.

In these definitions the teachers begin to provide some key characteristics of a learner who can take responsibility for learning: an ability to define one's own objectives; awareness of how to use language materials effectively; careful organization of time for learning, and active development of learning strategies. Many of these characteristics accord with the descriptions of the 'good language learner' which have been derived from research studies.



Since the late 1980s we have seen a proliferation of terms relating to this concept of self-directed learning: autonomous learning, self-monitoring, self-assessment, learner strategies, self-help learning strategies, strategic investment, learner training, self-study, self-access learning. The key concepts that have emerged, however, and around which others pivot, are those of *learner autonomy* (which for our purposes can be taken as synonymous with self-directed learning) as a goal for learners, and *learner training*, or the teacher's encouragement of their efforts towards that goal.

Ideas about learner autonomy and learner training have come to the ELT profession through two major sources of influence: insights from research studies into second language acquisition, and educational thinking of the last few decades.

## 3.2 What do we know about the strategies of the 'good language learner'?

### 3.2.1 *Types of learner strategy*

One set of arguments for encouraging greater independence in language learners comes from research studies into the characteristics of the 'good language learner'. It is interesting that in recent years the intuitions of experienced language teachers about what makes for a successful learner have been backed up by the findings of research into learner strategies. Rubin defines learner strategies as including:

any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information, ... that is, what learners *do* to learn and *do to regulate* their learning. (Rubin 1987: 19)

A simple way of distinguishing between these is to say that what learners do to learn involves strategies that deal directly with the second language (*cognitive strategies*) and what learners do to *regulate* their learning involves strategies that manage learning (*metacognitive strategies*). For the language teacher, the issue is whether it is possible to help learners acquire and develop strategies of either kind which will enhance their ability to learn inside or outside the classroom.

### Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies are thought processes used directly in learning which enable learners to deal with the information presented in tasks and materials

by working on it in different ways. For example, this extract from a learner's diary shows her using analogy in order to distinguish the meanings of verbs in German:

Today I learned the distinction between 'wissen' and 'kennen', i.e. 'to know'. I was pleased to discover that, because of doing French ('savoir' and 'connaître') I was able to understand the point quite well.

Analogy can be seen as part of the more general strategy of deductive reasoning (Rubin 1987), that is, looking for rules in the second language on the basis of existing knowledge about language.

Another cognitive strategy is memorization. This learner, for example, (Pickett 1978) finds that both visual and auditory memory are important:

**Visual:** Shape of the word as a visual form, whether printed or hand written is memorised. I find that some words are memorised in print and some in handwriting, usually but not always my own.

**Auditory:** The sound of the item reverberates somehow in the mind even though silently; or it may be assisted by subliminal tongue movements ...

(Pickett 1978: 110)

Examples of other cognitive strategies are repetition (i.e. imitating a model), writing things down, and inferencing (i.e. making guesses about the form or meaning of a new language item). Thus, a learner might guess the meaning of 'drawer' in the sentence 'He kept the papers safely in a locked drawer of the desk.' Several clues would help: the adjective-noun relationship between 'locked' and 'drawer'; the meaning link with 'safely', and the learner would almost certainly have knowledge about the structure of desks and the nature of drawers in them.

### Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies involve planning for learning, thinking about learning and how to make it effective, self-monitoring during learning, and evaluation of how successful learning has been after working on language in some way. So, when learners preview the next unit of their coursebook, read carefully through the teacher's comments on their written work, or review the notes they have made during class, they are using metacognitive strategies.

### Communication strategies

A further category sometimes included in frameworks of learner strategies is that of *communication strategies*. When learners use gesture, mime, synonyms, paraphrases, and cognate words from their first language to make themselves