An Overview of Language Teaching Methods and Approaches

> "…there is, as Gebhard et al.(1990:16) argue, no convincing evidence from pedagogic research, including research into second language instruction, that there is any universally or 'best' way to teach. Although, clearly, particular approaches are likely to prove more effective in certain situations, blanket prescription is difficult to support theoretically. The art of teaching does not lie in accessing a checklist of skills but rather in knowing which approach to adopt with different students, in different curricular circumstances or in different cultural settings (Klapper 2001:17).

Such pedagogic choices are most effective when underpinned by an appreciation of what support theory, or indeed the range of theories available, can bring to practice. But what experience of theory does the average higher education teacher of *ab initio*, or language teaching in general possess?

> "…in view of the fact that many junior academics in language departments are required to spend a considerable amount of their time teaching practical language classes, and that many of them come to the task from an academic research background, often involving a topic in the fields of literacy, cultural, historical or area studies, it is surprising and a little worrying that departments are not doing more to prepare staff for a substantial part of their academic role. Bearing in mind the typical background and profile of senior academic linguist, it would be unreasonable to expect most language departments to mount a programme of raining independently; nevertheless, there is much room for collaborative provision with Education and Staff Development or, where one exists, a language centre. Unless the decision is taken to hive off language teaching to a specialist centre or to dedicated, trained language-teaching staff, it might be thought that departments should ensure that anyone embarking on a career in languages is at the very lest introduced to the rudiments of second language acquisition and second language instruction, the theory and practice of grammar teaching, approaches to translation, techniques for teaching listening and reading, applications of ICT, and assessment of language proficiency (Klapper 2001: 7-8).

There is moreover wide divergence in the various aims of language teaching and learning. Quist (2000) discusses a 'clash of cultures' in language teaching in universities, between the liberal tradition which emphasises the cultural and intellectual aims of language teaching and learning in Higher Education, and the instrumental paradigm which emphasises 'real-world' skills with "an emphasis on speaking and interpersonal skills at the cost of writing or accuracy" (Quist 2000: 131). The CRAMLAP questionnaire responses reflected this clash in aims and methodology in Regional and Minority Languages teaching and learning, broadly reflected within the 'Philological' and 'Communicative' traditions, but there was often little in the responses to suggest theoretical reflection.

Given the gap between practice and access to theory, we will now proceed to a summary of methods and theory in the expectation that it will help teachers in higher education to ground their future practice

Debate and developments around the methods of language teaching and learning have been ongoing since the time of Comenius in the 17th century, if not before. The complexity of contexts and the greater appreciation of the issues lead us to the conclusion that the panacea of a single, universal, optimum method for teaching and learning modern languages does not exist. Instead, teachers now acknowledge the need to adopt an informed eclectic approach, incorporating elements from the range of methods available. Most language teaching today emphasise oral communication, although many Higher Education programmes, including some CRAMLAP questionnaire respondents, place greater emphasis upon grammatical mastery and reading.

In attempting to define what 'method' is, we can consider Edward Anthony's tripartite distinction of **Approach, Method and Technique** (Anthony: 1963).

This distinction was developed and recast by Richards and Rodgers (1982, 1985) as **Approach, Design and Procedure**, encompassed within the overall concept of **Method**, "an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice" (Richards & Rodgers 1985: 16) where

- ➢ *Approach* refers to the beliefs and theories about language, language learning and teaching that underlie a method

> - *Design* relates the theories of language and learning to the form and function of teaching materials and activities in the classroom;
> - *Procedure* concerns the techniques and practices employed in the classroom as consequences of particular approaches and designs.

(Richards & Rodgers 1985:17)
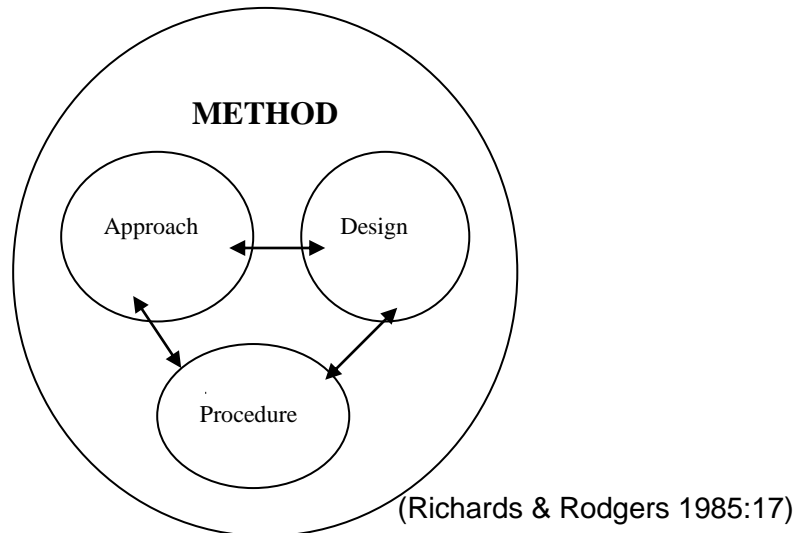
There are many publications discussing the various language teaching methods employed over the years. We have drawn here, inter alia, upon Chapter Two of H. Douglas Brown's *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (Longman/ Pearson Education, White Plains, New York, 2nd edition 2001).

Brown draws a distinction between **methods** as "specific, identifiable clusters of theoretically compatible classroom techniques" (p15), and **methodology** as "pedagogical practices in general…Whatever considerations are involved in 'how to teach' are methodological" (ibid.).'Methodology' here can thus be equated to Richards and Rodgers' 'Procedure'.

Pedagogic approaches are typically informed by both a theory of language and a theory of language learning. For example, audiolingualism was informed by a structuralist model of language and by behaviourist learning theory (Richards and Rodgers 1986).

The twentieth century saw new methods emerging with regularity in what Marckwardt (1972:5) saw as a cyclical pattern of "changing winds and shifting sands" with each new method breaking from what preceded, while incorporating some of the positive aspects of its predecessors. This mortality of language learning methods, to use

Decoo's phrase can usually be attributed to the neglect or lack of one particular component (Decoo 2001: §4.5)

Brown summarises:

> A glance through the past century or so of language teaching will give an interesting picture of how varied the interpretations have been of the best way to teach a foreign language. As disciplinary schools of thought – psychology, linguistics, and education, for example – have come and gone, so have language-teaching methods waxed and waned in popularity. Teaching methods, as "approaches in action," are of course the practical application of theoretical findings and positions. In a field such as ours that is relatively young, it should come as no surprise to discover a wide variety of these applications over the last hundred years, some in total philosophical opposition to others.
>
> <div align="right">Brown 2001: 17-18</div>

The Grammar-Translation Method

The Classical or Grammar-Translation method represents the tradition of language teaching adopted in western society and developed over centuries of teaching not only the classical languages such as Latin and Greek, but also foreign languages. The focus was on studying grammatical rules and morphology, doing written exercices, memorizing vocabulary, translating texts from and prose passages into the language. It remained popular in modern language pedagogy, even after the introduction of newer methods. In America, the Coleman Report in 1929 recommended an emphasis on the skill of reading in schools and colleges as it was felt at that time that there would be few opportunities to practise the spoken language. Internationally, the Grammar-Translation method is still practised today, not only in courses, including CRAMLAP respondents, teaching the classical older stages of languages (Latin, Greek, Old Irish etc.) where its validity can still be argued in light of expected learning outcomes, but also, with less justification, in some institutions for modern language courses. Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979:3) listed the major characteristics of Grammar-Translation:

- ➢ Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language;
- ➢ Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words;

- Long, elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given;
- Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words;
- Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early;
- Little attention is paid to the context of texts, which are treated as exercices in grammatical analysis;
- Often the only drills are exercices in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue;
- Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.

Decoo attributes the grammar-translation method's fall from favour to its lack of potential for lively communication.

A greater attention to grammar (focus on form/ structure) has now re-emerged as well as appropriate integration by teachers of structures into content focused lessons. But the explicit teaching of grammatical paradigms in isolation is rare nowadays.

The Direct Method

While Henri Gouin's *The Art of Learning and Studying Foreign Languages*, published in 1880, can be seen as the precursor of modern language teaching methods with its 'naturalistic' approach, the credit for popularising the Direct Method usually goes to Charles Berlitz, who marketed it as the Berlitz Method.

The basic premise of the Direct Method was that one should attempt to learn a second language in much the same way as children learn their first language. The method emphasised oral interaction, spontaneous use of language, no translation between first and second languages, and little or no analysis of grammar rules.

Richards and Rodgers summarized the principles of the Direct Method as follows (2001: 12)

- Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language;
- Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught;

- Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around questions-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small intensive classes;
- Grammar was taught inductively;
- New teaching points were taught through modelling and practice;
- Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, pictures; Abstract vocabulary was taught through association of ideas;
- Both speech and listening comprehension were taught;
- Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

Decoo identifies as its weakness the lack of insight into the reality of the classroom situation for most learners, in its aspiration to a mastery of the language that few could achieve.

Many of the elements of the Direct Method listed above will be familiar to teachers in Higher Education, which, however, now includes more language use tailored to the needs and experiences of the students, and also a return to 'focus on form' (language structures)

The Audio-Methods

The Audiolingual/Audiovisual Method is derived from "The Army Method," so called because it was developed through a U.S. Army programme devised after World War II to produce speakers proficient in the languages of friend and foes. In this method, grounded in the habit formation model of behaviourist psychology and on a Structural Linguistics theory of language, the emphasis was on memorisation through pattern drills and conversation practices rather than promoting communicative ability.

Characteristics of the Audio-Methods:
- New material is presented in dialogue form;
- There is dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and overlearning
- Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis taught one at a time;
- Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills;
- There is little or no grammatical explanation. Grammar is taught by inductive analogy rather than by deductive explanation;
- Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context;

- ➤ There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids;
- ➤ Great importance is attached to pronunciation;
- ➤ Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted;
- ➤ Successful responses are immediately reinforced;
- ➤ There is a great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances;
- ➤ There is a tendency to manipulate language and disregard content.

(adapted from Prator & Celce-Murcia 1979)

The Oral-Situational Approach

This resembles the Audiolingual approach as it is based on a structural syllabus but it emphasises the meanings expressed by the linguistic structures, not just the forms, and also the situations or contexts chosen to practise the structures. It can be found in courses dating from the 1970s which are now criticised for not achieving the hoped-for results.

As they were based on behaviourist psychology (see below), the Audio-method and Oral-situational approach were limited by their neglect of cognitive learning. The drill-based approach in the classroom re-emerged in early Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software where it was perceived to motivate pupils and develop autonomous study and learning. CALL is now more sophisticated and can foster cognitive learning as well.

Psychological Traditions

Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour. Since the middle of the 20th century, psychological views of teaching and learning have been dominated by Behaviourist and then Cognitive theory. There is an abundance of sources describing and discussing these theories. An accessible website presenting theories of psychology and teaching and learning is maintained by Atherton and can be found at http://www.learningandteaching.info/

Behaviourism

The behaviourist view of learning emphasises the repetitive conditioning of learner responses. Behaviourism is based on the proposition that behaviour can be researched scientifically. Learning is an automatic process which does not involve any cognitive processes in the brain.

Pavlov's "Respondent Conditioning" results from the association of two stimuli, such as causing dogs to salivate at the sound a tuning fork.

Skinner developed "Operant Conditioning" where the "Stimulus-Response" association is elicited through selective reinforcement (rewards or punishments) to shape behaviour

Behaviourist Learning Theory is a process of forming habits; the teacher controls the learning environment and learners are empty vessels into which the teacher pours knowledge.

Behaviourist Language Theory is based upon Structuralist Linguistics and is identified with the Audiolingual/ Audiovisual method, - associated with the use of rote learning with repetitive drills.

Behaviourists argued that teachers could link together content involving lower level skills and create a learning 'chain' to teach higher skills. Nevertheless, while circumstances and classroom practice might still benefit from such an approach, the limitations of behaviourism are apparent as it lacks recognition of problem solving and learning strategies.

Cognitivism

As a reaction to behaviourism, the "cognitive revolution" in the 1950s combined new thinking in psychology, anthropology and linguistics with the emerging fields of computer science and neuroscience.

Cognitive Learning Theory emphasised the learner's cognitive activity, involving reasoning and mental processes rather than habit formation

Cognitive Language Theory emerged from the Chomskyan Revolution which gave rise in Language Method to Cognitive Code Learning, etc

Cognitive learning goes beyond the behaviourist learning of facts and skills, adding cognitive apprenticeship to the learning process. Learners are encouraged to work out rules deductively for themselves. It focuses on building a learner's experiences and providing learning tasks that can challenge, but also function as 'intellectual scaffolding' to help pupils learn and progress through the curriculum. Broadly speaking, cognitive theory is interested in how people understand material, and thus in aptitude and capacity to learn and learning styles (see Atherton). As such it is the basis of constructivism and can be placed somewhere in the middle of the scale between behavioural and constructivist learning.

Chomsky

Noam Chomsky is identified with the *Innatist* or *Nativist theory*. As seen in the discussion under the age factor, Chomsky claims that children are biologically programmed to acquire language, as they are for other biological functions such as walking, which a child normally learns without being taught. While the environment supplies people who talk to the child, language acquisition is an unconscious process. The child activates the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), an innate capability or blueprint that endows the child with the capability to develop speech from a universal grammar.

Cognitive Code Learning

With the Chomskyan revolution in linguistics, the attention of linguists and language teachers was drawn towards the 'deep structure' of language and a more cognitive psychology. Chomsky's theory of Transformational-generative Grammar focused attention again on the rule-governed nature of language and language acquisition rather than habit formation. This gave rise in the 1960s to **Cognitive Code Learning** where learners were encouraged to work out grammar rules deductively for themselves.

Deductive Learning	Grammatical explanations or rules are presented and then applied through practice in exercices
Inductive Learning	Learners are presented with examples. They then discover or induce language rules and principles on their own

Cognitive code learning achieved only limited success as the cognitive emphasis on rules and grammatical paradigms proved as off-putting as behaviourist rote drilling.

Alternative or 'Designer' methods

The 1970s saw the emergence of some alternative, less-commonly used methods and approaches, such as **Suggestopedia; The Silent Way; Total Physical Response**. An overview table of these 'Designer' methods is provided by Nunan (1989: 194-195) and Brown (2001: chapter 2).

Decoo (200l §4.2) makes the important point that new methods such as these may succeed initially when introduced by skilled and enthusiastic teachers or personalities and are delivered in experimental or well financed situations with well behaved, responsive and motivated students and small classes. Problems arise, however, when attempts are made to widen such methods out to less ideal situations, with large classes, low motivation and discipline issues. Nevertheless, such methods may continue to thrive in privileged circumstances with motivated teachers, as has been the case with the Silent Way or Suggestopedia, which continue to find supporters throughout the world.

Approach replacing Method

If 'Method' involves a particular set of features to be followed almost as a panacea, it can be suggested that we are now in a 'Post-Method' era where the emphasis is on the looser concept of 'Approach' which starts from some basic principles which are then developed in the design and development of practice. Accordingly, the Richards and Rodgers model (1985) might be recast as follows, without the outer shell of 'Method':
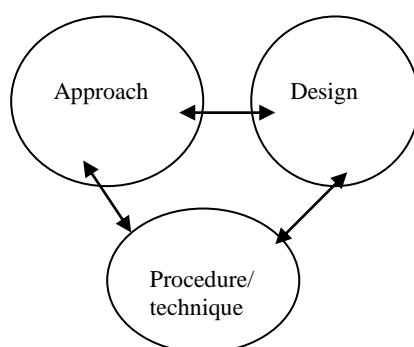
The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach, with echoes of the 'naturalistic' aspect of the Direct Method, was developed by Krashen and Terrell (1983). It emphasised "Comprehensible Input", distinguishing between 'acquisition' – a natural subconscious process, and 'learning' – a conscious process. They argued that learning cannot lead to acquisition. The focus is on meaning, not form (structure, grammar). The goal is to communicate with speakers of the target language.

Krashen summarises the input hypothesis thus:

> We acquire language in an amazingly simple way – when we understand messages. We have tried everything else – learning grammar rules, memorizing vocabulary, using expensive machinery, forms of group therapy etc. What has escaped us all these years, however, is the one essential ingredient: comprehensible input (Krashen 1985: vii).

Unlike Chomsky, moreover, Stephen Krashen's linguistic theories had a more direct relationship to language learning and acquisition, thereby bringing them to the attention of language teachers around the world.

Krashen, along with Terrell, developed the "input theory," which stresses maximum amounts of passive language or what Krashen (1979) refers to as 'i+1' (input + 1), language input that is just a little beyond the learner's current level of comprehension. Krashen contends that through context and extralinguistic information, like a mother talking to her child, hence the 'natural approach', learners will climb to the next level and then repeat the process. The message is more important than the form. The input is one way, from the teacher, and learners will participate when ready.

Nunan's overview of the Natural Approach (1989, 194-195), adapted here, outlines its characteristics:

Theory of language
The essence of language is meaning. Vocabulary not grammar is the heart of language
Theory of Learning
There are 2 ways of L2 language development:
Acquisition a natural sub-conscious process;
Learning a conscious process. Learning cannot lead to acquisition
Objectives
Designed to give beginners/ intermediate learner communicative skills. Four broad areas; basic personal communicative skills (oral/written); academic learning skills (oral/written)
Syllabus
Based on a selection of communicative activities and topics derived from learner needs
Activity types
Activities allowing comprehensible input, about things in the here-and-now. Focus on meaning not form
Learner roles
Should not try and learn language in the usual sense, but should try and lose themselves in activities involving meaningful communication
Teacher roles
The teacher is the primary source of comprehensible input. Must create positive low-anxiety climate. Must choose and orchestrate a rich mixture of classroom activities
Roles of materials
Materials come from realia rather than textbooks. Primary aim is to promote comprehension and communication

The Natural Approach was based upon Krashen's theories of second language acquisition, and his Five Hypotheses:

Krashen's Five Hypotheses
The *Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis*: claims that there are two distinctive ways of developing second language competence:

acquisition, that is by using language for "real communication"
learning .. "knowing about" or "formal knowledge" of a language
The ***Natural Order hypothesis***; 'we acquire the rules of language in a predictable order'
The ***Monitor Hypothesis***: 'conscious learning ... can only be used as a Monitor or an editor' (Krashen & Terrell 1983) and cannot lead to fluency
The ***Input Hypothesis***: 'humans acquire language in only one way - by understanding messages or by receiving "comprehensible input"'
The ***Affective Filter Hypothesis***: 'a mental block, caused by affective factors ... that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device' (Krashen, 1985, p.100)

Cook presents a *Combined model of acquisition and production* on his website

The Input Hypothesis Model of L2 learning and production (adapted from Krashen, 1982, pp. 16 and 32; and Gregg, 1984)
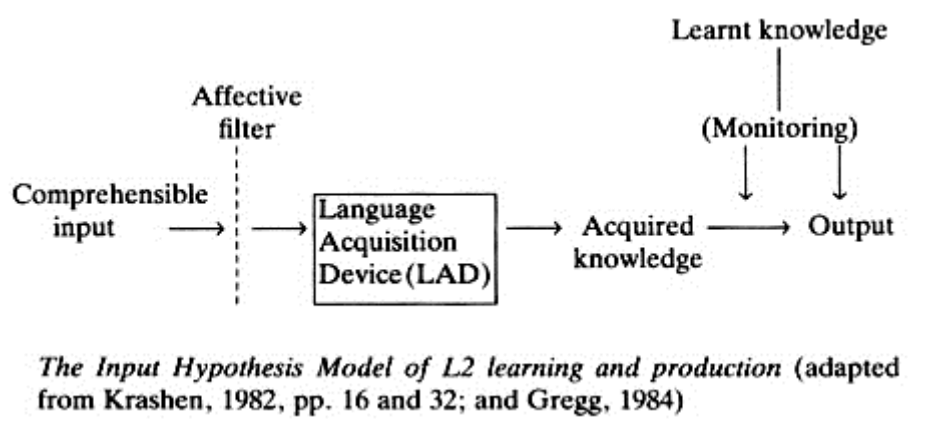
For Krashen, a conscious knowledge of grammar rules is of limited value and can at most enable the student to 'monitor' production (Krashen 1982: 15).

Communicative Language Teaching
Influenced by Krashen, approaches emerged during the 1980s and 1990s which concentrated on the communicative functions of language. Classrooms were characterized by attempts to ensure authenticity of materials and meaningful tasks.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as the norm in second language and immersion teaching. As a broadly-based approach, there are any number of

definitions and interpretations, but the following interconnected characteristics offered by Brown (2001: 43) provide a useful overview:

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence. Goals therefore must intertwine the organizational aspects of language with the pragmatic.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. Students in a communicative class ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom. Classroom tasks must therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts.
5. Students are given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning.
6. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing bestower of knowledge. Students are therefore encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with others.

The communicative approach was developed mainly in the context of English Second Language (ESL) teaching. The question must be asked, however, how universal can its application be? Decoo (§4.3) points out that one can relatively easily reach a fair level of communication in English, which has a relatively simple morphology (e.g. simple plurals with 's', no adjectival agreement, no gender markers, etc). Neither is mastery of the highly irregular orthography of English a priority in an oral communication approach. French, for example, requires mastery of an enormously greater number of elements to reach a similar first year communicative level (different articles in front of nouns, gender, adjectival agreement, numerous verbal forms etc.). It is fatal for the progression and motivation of the learner to ignore this complexity. With Irish, the apparently simple notion

"Where do you live?" is not rendered by a simple question form of the verb 'to live', but by an idiom denoting state "Cá bhfuil tú i do chónaí?" ("Where are you in your living?") linking it not with a verbal construction, but with the other idioms denoting state by means of the preposition, personal adjective, and noun construction, "i do luí, shuí, etc.". This construction, and the other distinctive features of Irish, are not inordinately difficult when taught in structural context, but it is different to English and other languages and requires appropriate adaptation if the communicative approach is to be adopted. The same can of course be said about other languages as well.

Notional-Functional Syllabus

The move from method to approach has also focused on syllabus design. The Notional/ Functional Syllabus (NFS) has been associated with CLT. The content of language teaching is organised and categorized by categories of meaning and function rather than by elements of grammar and structure. The work of Van Ek and Alexander (1975) for the Council of Europe and Wilkins (1976) has been influential in syllabus design up to the present day, and the Common European Framework (CEFR). The CEFR emphasises that consideration must be given to the role of grammatical form in its delivery:

> The Framework cannot replace reference grammars or provide a strict ordering (though scaling may involve selection and hence some ordering in global terms) but provides a framework for the decisions of practitioners to be made known. (Council of Europe 2001a: 152)

The breadth of possible applications of Communicative Language Teaching can lead to misinterpretations. In United Kingdom schools, for example, the National Curriculum introduced in 1988 led to a topic-based emphasis for modern languages subject teaching that sidelined the role of grammar, arguing from Krashen that comprehensible input alone was required. This ignored, however, the difference in context between transitional bilingual education for Spanish speakers in the USA and the few classes a week offered in British schools. Immersion education, on the other hand, recognised the positive potential of the CLT.

Responses to CRAMLAP questionnaires show a great diversity in models of ab initio teaching in Higher Education, with some institutions emphasising grammatical competence, others communicative, others again a combination of both.

However, the belief that exposure to 'comprehensible input + 1' could be sufficient to ensure language acquisition is now challenged. We are now in a 'Post-Communicative' era, influenced by a Constructivist theory of learning (see below).

Post-Communicative Language Teaching

Krashen's theories on language acquisition have been challenged by researchers and theorists who recognise that while rich language input is necessary, it is not sufficient to create proficient speakers of the target language, even in immersion contexts, as Hammerly argued:

> If 'comprehensible input' alone were adequate in the classroom, immersion graduates, after over 7000 hours of such input, would be very competent speakers of the second language – but they are not. They are very inaccurate (Hammerly 1991: 9).

Language teaching and learning has entered a 'Post-Communicative' phase which takes a more constructivist view of learning emphasising personal learning and discovery on the part of the learner, with more task-based, collaborative work between learners, and a more facilitating role for the teacher.

Immersion programmes in Canada were found to achieve good listening and reading comprehension in the target language, but relatively poor achievement in the productive skills of reading and writing (Genesee, 1987; Harley and Swain, 1984; Swain, 1985). Johnstone (2002:5) summarises as follows:

> Views about immersion pedagogy have changed over the years. Initially it tended to be considered good practice for the immersion teacher to use the immersion language extensively and for the pupils to focus on the subject-matter meanings that the teacher was transmitting. Underlying this was an assumption that extensive Immersion Language input plus focus on meaning would trigger natural language acquisition mechanisms in children so that they intuitively absorbed the underlying structure of the language, i.e. they would not need to focus on form as much as on meaning. Research suggests however that whereas this has undoubtedly encouraged confidence and fluency it often leads to pupils reaching a 'plateau' (fossilisation') with

recurrent problems in gender, syntax and morphology, rather than continuing to develop.

Age Factor

For adult learners, as is the case with Higher Education, there is research evidence to suggest that instruction may be more effective at an age, from the end of elementary schooling on, when learners have the maturity and motivation to use or transfer appropriate learning strategies (Harley and Hart, 1997; Muñoz, 1999; Singleton, 1989).

Focus on Form

The view that input exposure to the target language is sufficient has been widely criticised. The lack of focus on form features strongly among Klapper's concerns with CLT (2003: 34):

- The embracing of a meaning-based pedagogy with little conscious attention to form, in direct contradiction of one of the classic statements of communicative competence (cf. Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983); [in CLT] grammar is tied to certain functional contexts and learners have to rely on unanalysed chunks of language without any real understanding of their structure;
- Forms appear independently of grammatical context; the resulting absence of a reliable frame of formal reference means learners' inaccuracies become systemic;
- The concomitant failure to build a generative language framework that enables learners to recombine linguistic elements and thus to create new or unique utterances.

While current approaches stress the need for a greater focus on form (see e.g. Doughty and Williams, 1998), Schmidt (1994, 2001) argues however that this 'focus on form' should be on specific forms, rather than a global approach. He emphasises the noticing by learners of specific linguistic items as they occur in input, rather than as awareness of grammatical rules.

The input and focus on form perspectives can also be seen in terms of experiential and analytic teaching. Harley (1991) distinguished between experiential and analytic teaching in immersion classrooms. Johnstone (2002 Chapter 5) sets out the two modes in a figure which draws on and adds to Harley's distinction:

Experiential and analytic immersion teaching

EXPERIENTIAL	ANALYTIC
Message-oriented focus	More focus on the L2 code (e.g.grammar, vocabulary, sound-system)
Exposure to authentic L2-use in class	Clarifies form-function-meaning relationships
L2 is the vehicle for teaching and learning important subject matter-use in class	Provides regular feedback to help learners restructure their developing internal representations of the L2 code
Teachers tend to do much or most of the talking	Provides guidance on the use of L2-learning strategies
Assumes learners acquire the underlying L2 rule-system through 'use' and 'absorption'.	Assumes that cognitive processing is needed, in addition to experiential acquisition.
Dangers: Learners' L2 development may 'fossilise' (reach a plateau) and they may show a tendency for 'smurfing' using small number of high-coverage items (e.g. 'chose', 'aller', 'faire') rather than develop to express more precise meanings	Dangers: May over-emphasise accuracy; may pay too much attention to form rather than to form-function-meaning relationships.

Johnstone 2002 Ch.5: Adapted from Harley, 1991

Johnstone summarises here that "good practice would ensure that both modes ('Experiential' and 'Analytic' teaching) were activated to avoid the dangers that arise if one of them is allowed to dominate the other".

Higher Education is at the other end of the scale from Immersion Education and veers towards the analytic.

Output; Intake; Interaction.

Merrill Swain (1985) argued that the failure to achieve native-like competence in grammar and other features may be due to the learners' lack of opportunities to actually use their target language. In a classroom environment, particularly where the emphasis is on rich input, the teachers do most of the talking while the pupils listen. Students tend to get few opportunities to speak and give short answers to questions. This is a crucial dilemna. If the teacher needs to supply substantial input,, how can s/he ensure that individual learners have enough opportunities to speak and practise the input received?

Swain's 'output hypothesis' (1985) maintains that opportunities for language production (the term now preferred to 'output') and practice need to be promoted for both written and spoken language with an emphasis on linguistic accuracy. Producing the target language, she claims, may force students to pay more attention to (or to 'notice') how the language is used and what they need to know in order to convey meaning, than does simply comprehending it. This triggers cognitive processes that might in turn generate new linguistic knowledge or consolidate their existing knowledge (Swain 1995, Swain and Lapkin 1995), a constructivist process.

Swain (2000a: 201-2) cites Netten and Spain (1989) in support of this view. In an observation of three Grade Two French immersion classes, the weakest class (Class A) outperformed the stronger classes on a test of French reading comprehension. Observations in the classroom revealed that Class A "…were constantly using, and experimenting with, the second language as they engaged in communications of an academic and social nature with their peers and the teacher…", whereas in the supposedly stronger class students "…had limited opportunities to use the second language to engage in real communication acts (1989:494).

In summary, therefore, output or production enhances fluency, but also creates students' awareness of gaps in their knowledge. Through collaborative dialogue (Swain 1999, 2000b) they are encouraged to experiment but also obtain vital feedback on their performance which in turn encourages further effort.

Gass and Selinker (1994) have advanced the idea of 'intake', wherein the input, (vocabulary, grammar and expressions) needs to be internalised by the pupil before meaningful output is possible. The teacher needs to ensure that the input is 'taken in', that is, recognised, understood, and acquired by the pupils.

Long (1996) developed the Interaction Hypothesis which focuses on the notion of *interaction* as a stimulus for effective output. Genuine communication through interaction can clearly be linked to constructivist theory. In this hypothesis, the process of interaction when a problem in communication is encountered and learners engage in negotiating for meaning, engenders acquisition. Input becomes comprehensible through the modifications from interaction. Again, feedback also leads learners to modify their output.

Activities to develop interaction include group and pairwork. Swain's Dictagloss, where pupils collaborate to reconstruct dictated texts (Kowal and Swain 1994, Swain 2000b) is now well established as an interaction activity.

Interaction can be developed through a task-based approach which permits a "problem-solving negotiation between knowledge that the learner holds and new knowledge" (Candlin and Murphy 1987:1). The pupils interact with each other, and the teacher, thereby encountering new language which they can assimilate and then use. The role of the teacher is to provide suitable tasks to facilitate this process. An effective way of developing tasks is through use of exemplars or 'recipes' which can be adapted to particular needs. The task-based approach to language learning will be discussed later.

In summary,
If we accept with Mitchell and Myles (2004: 261) that "there can be 'no one best method'…which applies at all times and in all situations, with every type of learner", we recognise that the diversity of contexts requires an informed, eclectic approach. To quote Nunan:

> It has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself (Nunan 1991: 228)

Examples from the immersion or school contexts may not always be applicable to particular Higher Education. Nevertheless, the CRAMLAP responses showed a full range of classroom environments in which the approaches to teaching and learning ranged from traditional grammar/translation to partial immersion.

Constructivism and Post-communicative Language Teaching

Constructivist Theories of Learning

Purely cognitivist theories have now developed into Constructivist theories of learning. Cohen and Manion (2004:167) explain that:

> "At heart there is a move away from instructing and instructivism and towards constructivism".

This

> "signals a significant move from attention on teaching to attention on learning; classrooms are places in which students learn rather than being mainly places in which teachers teach. Teachers are facilitators of learning (Cohen & Manion 2004: 167)

Cognitive constructivism **Jean Piaget (1896-1980**)

Piaget (1952 The Origins of Intelligence) is concerned with how the learner develops understanding. Children's minds are not empty, but actively process material. The role of maturation (growing up) and children's increasing capacity to understand their world in terms of developmental stages is central to his view.

- Children are constrained by their individual stage of intellectual development. They cannot undertake certain tasks until they are psychologically mature enough to do so.

- There is an emphasis on discovery learning rather than teacher imparted information

- The readiness to learn, when learners are to progress, is different for each individual

- The idea of a linear development through stages has been widely used in the design and scheduling of school curricula.

Higher Education students have, of course, reached maturity.

Social Constructivism

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)

   http://tip.psychology.org/vygotsky.html

While Piaget hypothesized that language developed to express knowledge acquired through interaction with the physical world, for Vygotsky, thought was essentially internalised speech, and speech emerges in social interaction.

Vygotsky and Bruner are identified with Social Constructivism which places more emphasis upon the role of language and how understanding and meanings grow out of social encounter.

> "For Vygotsky , learning is a social, collaborative and interactional activity in which it is difficult to 'teach' specifically – the teacher sets up the learning situation and enables learning to occur, with intervention to provoke and prompt that learning through scaffolding " (Cohen & Manion 2004:168).

Vygotsky is identified with the theory of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). 'Proximal' simply means 'next' and the ZPD is the distance or gap between a child's actual level of development as observed when working independently without adult help and the level of potential development when working in collaboration with more capable peers or adults. The other person in not necessarily teaching them how to perform the task, but the process of interaction and enquiry makes possible new understandings or a refinement of performance. For Vygotsky, therefore, the development of language and articulation of ideas is central to learning and further development. The learner's current level reflects the importance of prior influences and knowledge. The learner is 'stretched' and ZPD is about "can do with help". The teacher's role is to place learning in the ZPD.

   Jerome Bruner (1915-)

Bruner is one of the key figures in the so-called 'cognitive revolution' that displaced behaviourism. Influenced by Piaget but later, and to a greater extent, Vygotsky (whom he is credited with having introduced to the West), he saw learning as an active knowledge-getting process in which learners construct new ideas based upon their current and past knowledge (Bruner *Acts of meaning* 1990) *Learning how to learn* is a central element, the process of learning is as important as the product, and social interaction is crucial. While concerned primarily with young children, much of Bruner's theory holds true for adult learners as well.

Extending Piagetian theory, Bruner suggested three modes of thinking which increasingly overlap each other:

- the *Enactive,* where learning takes place through actions, manipulating objects and materials;
- the *Iconic,* where objects are represented by images which are recognised for what they represent, but can also be created independently;
- the *Symbolic*, words and numbers, which represents how children make sense of their experiences and language becomes an increasingly important means of representing the world, enabling thinking and reasoning in the abstract.

"Teachers need to be aware of the ways in which learning can be enhanced by using these three modes. At the enactive level, we can see the importance of the use of drama, play, total physical response and the handling of real objects. The iconic mode would be brought into play through the use of pictures, or words in colour. At the same time, learners begin to use the symbolic mode as they use the target language … to express ideas in context"
(Williams & Burden *Psychology for Language Teachers* CUP 1997: 26-27)

Bruner's term **Scaffolding** (Wood, Bruner, and Ross 1976) has come to be used for the support for learning provided by a teacher to enable a learner to perform tasks and construct understandings that they would not quite be able to manage on their own as the learner moves towards mastery and autonomy, when the scaffolding is gradually phased out. It enables the teacher to extend the pupil's work and active participation beyond his current abilities and levels of understanding within the ZPD.

Common elements of scaffolding include:

- defining tasks
- direct or indirect instructing
- specification and sequencing of activities
- modelling and exemplification; simplification
- reinforcing
- questioning
- provision of materials, equipment and facilities
- other environmental contributions

As well as scaffolding provided by the teacher, students collaborating in small groups can provide scaffolding for each other – ICT would be a prime environment for such work. This would exemplify and emphasise Vygotsky's view that learning is a social as well as an individual activity.

David and Heather Wood developed the theory of **Contingency** in instruction.

http://www.psychology.nottingham.ac.uk/staff/Heather.Wood/

Contingency developed from work on face-to-face tutoring. It attempts to strike a balance between:

- ensuring that learners solve for themselves as many of the problems in a task as possible,

and

- intervening when the task is too difficult in order to avoid prolonged failure

The goals of contingent tutoring in assisted problem solving are:
 * The learner should not succeed too easily
 * Nor fail too often.

The principles are:
 * When learners are in trouble, give more help than before *(scaffolding)*
 * When they succeed, give less help than before *(fading)*

Critique

Constructivism is a theory and as such is open to critique as differing little from common sense empiricist views, or as providing misleading and incomplete views of human learning (Fox 2001). An overly enthusiastic endorsement of constructivism might reduce the teacher's role to that of a facilitator, with the students in 'discovery mode'. This is unlikely to be wholly satisfactory in Higher Education, either for teachers or learners, and an element of instructivism is to be expected. Nevertheless, Fox acknowledges that "the greatest insight of constructivism is perhaps the realisation of the difference made by a learner's existing knowledge and values to what is learned next, both in facilitating and inhibiting it (ibid. 33).

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