LECTURE 6

Language Classroom (CR) and SLA

6.1. Types of CR Research

Language CR and CR life

The classroom has been defined as ‘ the gathering, for a given period of time, of two or more persons

(one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning’ (van Lier 1988 : 47).

Gaies has noted (1980; in Allwright and Hanks, 2009), the classroom is the crucible- the place where teachers and learners come together and language learning, we hope, happens. It happens, when it happens, as a result of the reactions among the elements that go into the crucible- the teachers and the learners.

Usually, in a CR a teacher talks to a group of 20-30 (or more) students for hours in (40-50) or less minute segment. They share what they know, how they do what they know, what they feel, what they think and what they plan to do all through interactions in the CR. The participants do not go in ‘empty-handed’. The learners bring with them their whole experience of learning and of life in the CR ; their culture and their reasons for being there, their beliefs, their idiosyncrasies, individual differences and their needs that they want to satisfy. The teacher, on the other hand, brings with him, too, experience of life (as a student and as a teacher), his beliefs, personality, and the syllabus which is embodied in the textbook. But everything still depends on how they react to each other when they all get together in the CR. Therefore understanding what happens in the CR is not a simple matter , i.e, life in the CR is complex as Tony Wright pointed out:

‘ CR life is what teachers and learners make it. At the same time, CR life is what they make of it and what it makes them. These apparently simple observations capture both the inherent contradictions of CR and its complex, systemic nature’ (in Gieve and Miller 2006, p. 64).

Learners and What We Think of Them

Tudor on learners (2001, p. 14), ‘ We can no longer assume that our students are ‘simply’ students, nor that they are bundles of discrete variables. They are complex human beings who bring with them to the CR their own individual

personality as it is at a given point in time, and this influences how they interact with what we do as teachers'.

Five propositions about learners

1. Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways.
2. Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment.
3. Learners are capable of taking learning seriously.
4. Learners are capable of independent cesicion-making.
5. Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.

By definition, classroom-centered research is simply research centered on the classroom as distinct from other research types. This research type usually views classroom as the "object" of research, and not simply the "setting" for research. Classroom-centered research should, however, be taken as a cover term for a whole range of research studies on classroom language learning.

Research on classroom language learning is basically done by either observation or introspection, or even a combination of both. Observation necessarily implies keeping a record of what goes on in the classroom. To this end, different techniques are available to the researcher. The use of audio-tape recordings, video-tape recordings, and so on could be enlisted as some of these techniques. Even a trained observer can handle the job of doing the observation.

A second approach to classroom-centered research is introspection. Allwright (1988) uses the term 'introspection' to refer to research techniques that involve, for instance, asking people to answer questions rather than asking them to allow themselves to be observed in action. In any case, introspection always calls for self-reporting of some kind. The use of questionnaires or interviews can be viewed as a good means of eliciting introspective data; a fairly recent development is the use of diary keeping.

A third approach is the use of what can safely be called "triangulation." Multiple viewpoints, at least three, may be necessary if we are to understand what actually goes on in classrooms. Allwright (1988) argues that, in practice, triangulation means a combination of observation and introspection. This calls for a good number of observers and introspects.

6.2. Processing instruction

Processing instruction refers to a type of instruction that takes as its basis how learners process input. In particular, it deals with the conversion of input to

intake and specifically focuses on form–meaning relationships. In a series of experiments, VanPatten and his colleagues presented a model for instructional intervention that relied heavily on the notion of attention to form and its crucial role in a learner's movement from input to intake and finally to output. They compared two instructional models, one in which input is practiced as a form of output manipulation (traditional grammar instruction in which information is presented to learners for practice) and the other in which an attempt is made to change the way input is perceived and processed (processing instruction). Rather than allow an internalized system to (begin to) develop, the attempt is to influence the way that input is processed and hence the way the system develops.

VanPatten (2008) presents three premises that are the basis of processing instruction:

1. Learners need input for acquisition;

2. A major problem in acquisition might be the way in which learners

process input;

3. If we can understand how learners process input, then we might be able to devise effective input enhancement or focus on form to aid acquisition of formal features of language.

VanPatten (2007) outlines three basic features of processing instruction.

1. Give learners information about a structure or form.

2. Inform learners about a particular processing strategy that may

get in the way of selecting the form/structure during comprehension.

3. Structure input so that learners must rely on form/structure to get

meaning and not rely on natural processing tendencies.

In sum, this approach to processing instruction attempts to deal with not just a linguistic difficulty, but with a problematic processing strategy and attempts to interrupt that strategy with overt instruction and practice.

6.3. Classroom Discourse and Naturalistic Discourse

For Seedhouse (1996), classroom discourse is an institutional type of discourse, in which the interactional aspects are similar to 'institutional goals'. Seedhouse (2009) stated that the first step to describing the interactional architecture of L2 classroom interaction is to recognize the 'institutional core goal'. From this core

goal, three intercational properties come to shape classroom interaction. The first property is that language functions on two levels, it is the vehicle and object of instruction. In other words, language is taught through language. The second property is that there is a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction. About this property Lier (1998, p.167) claimed that CR talk '… is seen as symbolic of the institutional power that serves to maintain and reproduce the power structures that define the institution and its purposes'.Further, the third interactional property is that the learners' output is subject to teachers' feedback and evaluation.

The perceived role of the EFL teacher is to prepare learners to use English outside the classroom. Nunan (1987) argues that the style of language used in the classroom environment may seriously effect a student's ability to cope in the real world, although this is contended by Seedhouse (1996). It seems therefore expedient for language teachers to analyse the language of the classroom and assess its effectiveness.

Classroom interactions can be categorized in general as teacher-fronted or student-centred in light of the central role that participants play (Garrett & Shortall, 2002). Teacher-fronted classroom interaction then refers to the IRF-based interactions in which the teacher has a high control over the interactional process (Garton, 2012). Gibbons (2006, pp. 114-117) categorizes different types of classroom talk according to students' participation, ranging from least to greatest participation, namely, 'teacher monologue', 'IRF' (Initiation-Response-Feedback), 'dialogic exchanges' and 'participatory exchanges'. Teacher monologue indicates 'a one-way transmission of information and directives', which is often used for setting up tasks or introducing new information (Gibbons, 2006, p. 114). The IRF pattern refers to less restricted turn taking, with the teacher initiating questions and students responding. However, the IRF pattern can be more participatory if the teacher's questions or feedback 'allow more extended discourse' (Thoms, 2012, p.21, see also van Lier, 1998; Wells, 1993). Extending the turns within the IRF exchange leads to a more participatory pattern in which dialogic exchanges include free extended sequences by students, while the teacher maintains overall control of the discourse (Gibbons, 2006). Participatory exchanges represent symmetrical participation in classroom interaction, with students' free participation and co-construction of knowledge among the teacher and students (Gibbons, 2006; Lemke, 1990; van Lier, 1996). Participatory exchanges are considered more authentic and more like the true dialogue that occurs in everyday life (Lemke, 1990).

However, The 21st century is the age of globalization with English as its 'Lingua Franca' which means that people use English to communicate with NSs and NNs of this language from diverse cultural backgrounds (Piasecka, 2011). In fact, the participants of such encounters (non-native speakers of English communicating in this language) have to cope with three different cultural contexts, namely their first language culture, their foreign language culture and the culture of their interlocutor. Since successful communication involves the recognition of the sociocultural context of the persons involved, these people have to be sensitive to the sociocultural aspects of communication as they participate in intercultural events which the acts of communication undoubtedly are (ibid). Successful communication definitely requires CC composed of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences combined with the language learner's general competences (CEFR, 2001).

These abilities are strongly connected with cultural aspects of communication and are the basis for identifying what has become to be known as intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The twenty first century, the age of globalization, the World Wide Web and the increased human mobility, has brought new challenges and demands to the FL teaching profession. Although langauge and culture teaching are inseparable, it is a common practice that language is given priority in second/ foreign language learning contexts (Piasecka, 2011). However, the challenges of the 21st century move second/ foreign language instruction towards a more cultural focus. Obviously, the language cannot be disregarded but it can also be acquired in culture-oriented contexts (ibid).