

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A 'GRAMMATIZATOR': AN ACCOUNT¹

M^a Adelaida Jurado Spuch
Universidad de La Laguna

INTRODUCTION

When Ellis, in his work of 1990,¹ develops a theory of tutored second language (L2) acquisition, he openly states that his aim is not to offer a drastic new account of the way teaching can influence language learning but to figure out the best possible way in which both theoretical positions in relation to L2 acquisition and L2 research findings can be interwoven in a set of proposals for L2 pedagogy (p. 175). At the start of the book, he acknowledges his long commitment to understanding how L2 acquisition can contribute to language teaching. He has already written a book (Ellis, 1985a) providing an overview of the whole field of L2 acquisition. And he had previously written (Ellis, 1984) on the detailed account of L2 development within the context of the classroom, making thus widely available the results of his own three-year research on how classroom learners of a L2 'pick up' a knowledge of a L2 when they are given the chance to communicate in it in contrast to being merely taught the L2 rule system. With this book he provided one of the first, and one of the few, accounts of classroom L2 acquisition. Now he focuses his perspective more tightly and concentrates on the specific area of L2 instruction and the research which has dealt with classroom L2 acquisition, positing that this research provides us with a theoretical understanding of how learners acquire a L2 through instruction.

It is argued that the early attempts to formulate a theory through extrapolation from general learning theory and from the study of naturalistic language acquisition have a historical context in the empirical study of classroom language acquisition. Ellis reviews a wide range of research which has addressed the issue of classroom language acquisition, and contends that nowadays it is possible to develop a theory of tutored L2 acquisition that is compatible with the results of this research. Although he recognizes the limitations inherent to the somewhat narrow base from which he operates –i.e. the issues that concern L2 acquisition researchers–, he underlines the complex nature of classroom language learning and postulates the ne-

cessity of gradually building up an understanding of it by drawing on the different approaches –linguistic, psycho-linguistic, socio-linguistic or educational– that offer insights into the processes that contribute to language learning (pp. vi-vii).

In the first chapter, Ellis states that the purpose of the book is to try to answer the question of how a L2 is learnt in a classroom. That is, its aim is to explore learning, not teaching. And L2 learning is equated with the construction of the mental grammar that underlies the use of a L2, a grammar-building activity performed by the classroom learners, not their teachers. Thus, the primary aim of the book is to understand the processes whereby learners internalize a knowledge of a L2, since such an understanding is considered to be the foundation upon which pedagogic principles should be based. It is added that without an explicitly formulated theory of classroom language learning it would not be possible to put to the test any statement about the way learners learn and how teachers ought to teach. Teaching, on the other hand, is not ignored because the crucial feature which distinguishes the tutored from a naturalistic setting is the attempt to teach the L2. A further noticeable theoretical issue that emerges is whether language is ‘teachable’, an issue that Ellis addresses when he specifies, in Chapter 7, the basic components on which his theory rests, i.e. a cognitive component which explains how learners develop the ability to use their knowledge in different kinds of tasks and a linguistic component which deals with how learners acquire a knowledge of L2 rules (p. 182).

AN INTEGRATED THEORY OF CLASSROOM L2 LEARNING

The theory that Ellis develops has two explicit main goals. First, to provide a set of statements or hypotheses about classroom L2 learning that are testable and, therefore, falsifiable. Second, to account for classroom L2 learning in a relevant and accessible way to teachers. The first goal indicates its scientific dimension. The second, its stance on appropriateness to the needs of a particular set of users (p. 185). As Ellis argued in his earlier book (1985a: 2), he still holds the view that teachers will benefit from making their theory of language learning explicit, and outlining the theory he presents us with in this book, he makes his current position in relation to classroom language acquisition clear, allowing us to critically scrutinize it and, at the same time, make our own position explicit (p. vii).

1. BASIC APPROACHES IN CLASSROOM L2 LEARNING THEORY BUILDING

Ellis, addressing the issue of how to build a theory of classroom language learning –i.e. the way in which classroom learners acquire a L2–, refers to the three basic approaches that have been used. The first assumes that classroom learning is just like any other kind of learning. It postulates that it can be explained with reference to a general theory of learning. Thus building a separate theory of classroom language learning is pointless. This approach has been, and still is, popular. In spite of the fact that there are researchers who strongly argue that language constitutes a separate language faculty and is acquired differently from

other knowledge systems, i.e. Chomsky (1959: 563; 575f.; 1965: 25; 1966: 4; 13; 17; 21; 1972: 100ff.; 113f.; 120; 1976: 12ff.; 71f.; 1980a: 33f.; 80; 90ff.; 103; 134ff.; 273; 1980b: 37; 109ff.; 1981: 34ff.; 1983; 1984 (1981): 3; 8f.; 1985 (1975): 9f.; 14; 52; 1986: 3f.; 20ff.; 54; 83f.; 1988: 4; 15ff.; 25ff.; 134f.; 1991a: 12ff.; 28; 1991b: 33ff.; 38; 49ff.) in particular and other researchers who also work within a Universal Grammar framework, i.e. Atkinson (1982; 1992: 2ff.), Pinker (1984: 31ff.; 1989a; 1989b), Hyams (1986), Cook (1988: 1ff.; 6; 12ff.; 20ff.; 55ff.; 69ff.; 1991: 7ff.; 22ff.; 116ff.), Flynn and O'Neil (1988), Stevenson (1988), Radford (1990), Smith (1990: 2ff.), Fromkin (1991: 84ff.; 96ff.), Goodluck (1986; 1991), Kasher (1991a: 126). Ellis advances that it is not only necessary to take careful notice of both the nature of language and the classroom setting but also to actually enter the classroom and observe what happens there, i.e. studies experimental in nature and extrinsic to the classroom are not relevant as far as classroom learning concerns because they neither have any reference to classroom behaviour nor was there any attempt in their design or execution to research classroom activities. This kind of extrapolation is immune to falsification.

The second approach, also popular, equates instructed L2 learning with naturalistic language learning, either child first language (L1) acquisition or naturalistic L2 acquisition. The assumptions subsumed under this approach –i.e. (1) the L2 = L1 hypothesis which states that L2 acquisition is similar to L1 acquisition, age being a confounding factor and (2) the belief that adults can acquire a L2 in the same way as children– are controversial and very difficult to prove. Ellis comments that it is much safer to claim that naturalistic L2 learning and classroom language learning have many features in common, and this is also much more amenable to empirical scrutiny. The two approaches already discussed have not taken the trouble of finding out what happens when instruction interferes with the learning process.

The third approach involves actual research in the language classroom. It emerged due to the great disparity between the theories of classroom language learning relating to each of the two previous approaches, i.e. from a general learning theory and from comparing tutored with naturalistic language learning. Classroom research has been executed under two research paradigms, hypothesis-testing research and exploratory-interpretative research. The former is experimental in design, uses quantitative data and statistical analysis, and aims to establish cause-effect relationships, i.e. explanation of how the events contribute to language learning. The latter is non-experimental in design, deals with qualitative data seeking to describe and understand classroom processes, and its principal tool is ethnography, i.e. interpretative analyses about how events occur and what motivates them, but are unable to prove whether instruction results in actual learning.

Ellis notes that although there is usually tension between the followers of the two research paradigms, there are in fact various mixed forms of research and that the complexity of the task facing the researcher would counsel the use of a varied and wide range of strategies of research. Furthermore he remarks the need to avoid a piecemeal application of the results of classroom research and to undertake this kind of research with the aim of building a theory of language learning. He concludes by underlining the urgency of redressing the balance of the teaching-learning relationship, predominantly understood as how to teach instead of how learning proceeds (pp. 5-6).

2. ASYMMETRY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND THEORY AND BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

Great caution should be exercised when considering the relationship between research and theory building and that between research and the pedagogic principles that can be drawn from it. According to this, Ellis reminds us of the mismatch between what is taught and what gets learnt by the learners. It seems that this disagreement is due to the fact that teaching does not equal learning, since factors other than mere theoretical considerations enter in the process of learning a cognitive skill such as language. This is also the reason why the different approaches mentioned above have not produced fully fledged theories of classroom language learning but only partially developed theories lacking either coherence or the required explicitness.

2.1 GENERAL LEARNING THEORY: AN EXTRAPOLATION

2.1.1 AUDIO-LINGUALISM

Audio-lingualism was the first explicit attempt to justify pedagogical techniques by referring to how learning a L2 proceeds. It took place during the 1950s and 1960s before the sub-field of Applied Linguistics known as Second Language Acquisition emerged. Structuralist linguistics and behaviourist psychology provided the main ideas on which to base language teaching. Classroom learning was inferred from a general learning theory, i.e. behaviourism. Ellis notes that audio-lingualism addressed in fact key issues of classroom learning, i.e. (i) the difference between explicit and implicit knowledge of a L2 and a consideration of which kind of knowledge should be aimed at in the classroom, (ii) the cause of learner errors and their role in learning, and (iii) types of classroom behaviours that would ensure successful learning. He also states that its popularity, in spite of having been proved inadequate as an account of language learning, remains until today because it represents an economical way out in the face of the difficulties encountered when language teaching is addressed in a different fashion.

2.1.2 COGNITIVE THEORY

Cognitive Theory, developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, represents the other general theory of learning which has influenced classroom language learning. Instead of emphasizing external behaviour it favours the role played by internal mental processing, i.e. how information is stored and retrieved. Its source is research into information processing and its key distinction is that between declarative and procedural knowledge. It contends that new linguistic knowledge is internalized via processes different in kind from those which allow to acquire control over this same knowledge and permit the learner to progress from declarative knowledge ('knowing that') to procedural knowledge ('knowing how'). To achieve the latter the learner needs to use his L2 knowledge in natural communication. It has been found out that cognitive learning theory accounts for classroom language learn-

ing more convincingly than audio-lingual learning theory because it recognizes the contribution that the learner's mental processing has in the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. Environmental factors are not key elements in the process of L2 acquisition any more. Ellis posits that one limitation of this theory is its inability to account for the regularities manifest in the sequence in which L2 knowledge is acquired. He comments further stating the need to distinguish between the proven fact that classroom language learning is *like* other forms of learning but that it is not the *same*, i.e. in some respects classroom language learning is special (Meisel et al., 1981; Pienemann, 1984; 1985; Pienemann and Johnston, 1987; Pica, 1983; Johnston, 1987).

2.2 NATURALISTIC LANGUAGE LEARNING: AN EXTRAPOLATION

The paradigm shift brought about in linguistics and related fields by Chomsky's (1959; 1965) theory of grammar questioned the validity of behaviourist theories of language learning and gave prominence to mentalist theories, which emphasized both the role played by the learner in the process of language acquisition (i.e. the creative construction by the learner) and the importance of innate knowledge. L1 acquisition studies began to be executed during the 1960s and instructed L2 acquisition began to feel the impact of these empirical studies, as the L1 = L2 hypothesis was brought into consideration (Brown, 1987). Second Language Acquisition emerged when empirical studies relating to L2 learning were undertaken in the late 1960s, i.e. error analysis studies, performance or cross-sectional studies and longitudinal case studies. Out of this research two outstanding findings surfaced: (1) learners seemed to construct their own rules because the errors they produced were developmental in nature, i.e. L1 interference was not the major source of learner error, as audio-lingual theory claimed, and (2) a number of grammatical features –i.e. negatives and interrogatives– showed to appear in a natural sequence of acquisition, in spite of age or learner L1 (Corder, 1967; 1978; Dulay and Burt, 1973; 1974; 1977). Radical views of classroom language learning –cognitivist in nature– came into consideration, i.e. cognitive code learning theory that was closely related to generative grammar. It was thought that metalingual knowledge –knowledge about language– was relevant to actual use of the L2 rule system, i.e. perception and awareness of this system preceded its use, and the classroom learner was understood to be equipped with an innate capacity for language learning. Motivation on the part of the learner and sufficient exposure to the target language were also considered central to the successful outcome of the learning enterprise.

2.3 CLASSROOM L2 RESEARCH

Classroom L2 research burgeoned in the seventies. Actual classroom behaviour was also observed, avoiding equating the real-life classroom situation with a laboratory and submitting methods to empirical scrutiny, i.e. the promotion of one teaching method over another was not taken for granted and large-scale comparative method studies were discredited as a way to investigate teaching-learning (Scherer

and Wertheimer, 1964 in Allwright, 1988; Clark, 1969; Smith, 1970 in Allwright, 1988; Allwright, 1988). Three are the types of relevant empirical studies of L2 classrooms undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s, i.e. classroom process research, the study of classroom interaction and L2 acquisition and the study of formal instruction and L2 acquisition.

2.3.1 CLASSROOM PROCESS RESEARCH

Observation has been the principal method of classroom process research, although a variety of methods have been employed in this research which has typically consisted of small-scale studies carried out to document the events that occur in the L2 classroom (van Lier, 1988). The aim of these studies is to describe classroom behaviour in detail because it is sought to draw an accurate record of what happens in order to understand how instruction and learning take place. Explanation of the way in which L2 learning is executed in the learner's mind is not provided, since the enquiry pursued by this research is social and socio-linguistic rather than psychological or psycho-linguistic –i.e. learning is not viewed as an activity which occurs in the learner's mind but as an interpersonal activity. Both the nature of interaction between the participants and the teacher's and the learner's discourse have been explored. This research has contributed to our understanding of what happens in teaching-learning by analysing the relationship between overt classroom behaviours and language learning. No explicit theory of classroom L2 learning has informed this research, which has been exploratory and illuminative in nature and has examined the teacher's and the learner's independent contributions to the learning process. In this way it has highlighted the activities which foster learning.

2.3.2 CLASSROOM INTERACTION AND L2 ACQUISITION

This kind of research investigates the relationship between classroom interaction and L2 learning. It is theory-led research, i.e. the interactional hypothesis (Long, 1983a) –one of the hypotheses that have fed off studies to test the causal relationship between meaning-negotiation and acquisition– states that abundance of opportunities to negotiate meaning in the face of communication breakdown enhance L2 acquisition, since learners will then focus their attention on L2 data that, as a result, are likely to enter into their mental grammars. Ellis posits that the evidence to back up the hypotheses relating to the relationship between interaction and learning is often tenuous and indirect, concluding that classroom interaction seems to actually fulfil the three possible roles allocated to it by their different proponents, i.e. strong, weak and zero roles respectively. That is, due to the many-faceted nature of language acquisition, certain kinds of interaction –i.e. collaborative discourse (Ellis, 1984; 1985b) or pushing learners to be precise and appropriate (Swain, 1985)– can determine the way learners acquire some structures, e.g. learning how to make conversations or consolidation of some complex structures once the learners have been pushed into producing an output that stretches

their linguistic capacity and, consequently, fossilization is prevented. The weak role states that interlanguage development is not determined by interaction but only facilitated, i.e. communication that provides the learner with comprehensible input makes intake easier for him (Long, 1983a; Krashen, 1985). The zero role stands on the fact that some learning can occur without any interaction, and that for some structures there is only need of very little help from the input or output (White, 1987). As a consensus has not yet been reached in relation to which theory best explains classroom language learning, Ellis suggests that from a pedagogic perspective what is relevant is to ponder over the most effective way of organizing interaction in the classroom so as to actually foster acquisition.

2.3.3 FORMAL INSTRUCTION AND L2 ACQUISITION

Another kind of research examines the effect of formal instruction on L2 acquisition, i.e. attempts to teach some specific features of the L2 code. According to whether these studies focus on the effect of formal instruction on the rate or final achievement of L2 learning or whether they focus on the sequence followed in the process of acquisition, two categories can be distinguished. In relation to the first category, research results indicate that formal learners outperform naturalistic learners, formal instruction being the essential difference between the two learning environments since the focus on form occurs in the classroom. Classroom learners usually learn quicker and reach further along the L2 route, i.e. get closer to native-like competence (Long, 1983b; Schmidt, 1983; Swain, 1985). Studies dealing with the effect of formal instruction on the sequence of L2 acquisition offer mixed results, although in general the sequence appears to be very similar in both naturalistic and formal environments (Ellis, 1987). Within studies of this type classroom experiments have been carried out into a subtype (Pienemann, 1984) in which it has been endeavoured to find out whether some specific grammatical features are amenable to being taught and consequently learnt. It has been discovered that some of these structures –i.e. developmental features– are immune to instruction unless the learner is psycho-linguistically 'ready' for them, i.e. they are beyond his current processing level, since the acquisition of these features is constrained by underlying developing speech processing mechanisms that constitute an implicational hierarchy. As a result, these structures are acquired in sequence (Pienemann, 1984: 201ff.; Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: 280). Furthermore it has been found that when some linguistic features are dealt with in formal instruction, the acquisition of other 'implicated' features is also triggered. Apart from the developmental structures mentioned above, there are structures considered to be variational because they can be acquired at different times by different learners, and they are certainly not acquired in a fixed sequence. Their acquisition depends upon socio-psychological factors –i.e. mental make-up and social situation– on the part of the learner, factors that will characterize the considerable variation that there is within each of the different developmental stages of the linguistic development of L2 learners (Meisel et al., 1981: 118f.; 128ff.; Pienemann and Johnston, 1987: 47f.; 70f.; 84).

This research has given fresh understanding to the constraints that impinge on the acquisition of new linguistic forms and also to how much formal instruc-

tion can achieve in comparison to naturalistic acquisition, i.e. formal language teaching does not allow learners to beat the 'natural' route of development (Dulay and Burt, 1973; 1974; Bailey et al., 1974; Lightbown et al., 1980; Felix, 1981; Pica, 1983; 1985).

3. THE ROLE OF FORM-FOCUSED AND MEANING-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

Ellis argues that any theory of classroom L2 learning has necessarily to consider both the role of form-focused and meaning-focused instruction and their respective contribution to the learning process. As tutored or classroom language learning is characterized by explicit intervention on the way interlanguage develops –i.e. samples of specific L2 features are offered for learning–, and is thus distinct from naturalistic language learning, where the L2 is picked up by the learner through exposure –i.e. 'naturally' in an untutored environment–, the way in which these pedagogic attempts are organized needs to be accounted for. According to Ellis, three are the options from which to choose: (i) learners' attention is directed to some specific features of the L2 code, (ii) authentic communication is sought after via specially designed meaning-focused activities or (iii) both form and meaning-focused activities are combined. Underlying any of the options is either the assumption that attention to the code is necessary for learning a L2 within a tutored environment or that although this attention is not central to the learning process it is nevertheless desirable so as to enhance it. In any case, it is thought that what is taught is learnable by those to whom it is addressed, i.e. the learners.

In relation to how attention to the code should be organized, Ellis reminds us of the distinction between the 'accumulated entities' view of language learning –i.e. L2 learning "... entails the successive mastery of steadily accumulating and increasingly complex language entities ..." (Rutherford, 1987: 6)– and viewing learning as consciousness-raising. The aim of the latter is to facilitate the acquisition of grammatical competence rather than gain it directly as traditional grammar teaching pursued (Corder, 1973: 331). Consciousness-raising allows the learner to actively participate in the construction and development of the interlanguage which emerges from the learning process. Another way of considering form-focused instruction is by taking into account either how to plan the input to the learner or how to organize the classroom process –i.e. syllabus-design and lesson planning on one hand, classroom methodology on the other.

As far as meaning-focused instruction goes, it seems that the prime question is the way in which interaction enhances the acquisition of new linguistic knowledge. This kind of instruction aims to provide opportunities for the learners to communicate making use of the L2 resources they actually have. Recourse to non-linguistic resources is also contemplated. The pedagogic arguments put forward in favour of this type of instruction (Ellis, 1986 in Ellis, 1990) are the development of fluency –i.e. opportunity to communicate will afford the development of strategic competence to repair breakdown in communication and also to automatize existing knowledge– and the ability learners are supposed to have to incorporate new knowledge when they are engaged in communication exchanges.

4. ELLIS'S (1990) PROPOSALS

When Ellis addresses his own proposals for an integrated theory of instructed L2 acquisition, he first refers to the literature which has examined the most prominent L2 acquisition theories (Ellis, 1985a; McLaughlin, 1987) and points out that these theories aim to account for the complexity of L2 acquisition. Therefore they seek to consider the various interrelated components which together constitute the key areas of the phenomena investigated, i.e. the interaction of those sets of factors which affect the process and success of L2 learning (Ellis, 1985a: ff.). He also underlines how important it is for a theory of classroom L2 learning to specify whether its intention is to deal with competence –i.e. the idea of static knowledge– or with proficiency –the idea of ability to use knowledge– (Taylor, 1988 in Ellis, 1990), since teachers are crucially concerned with how learners develop the ability to use the L2 knowledge they acquire. Consequently this aspect of language pedagogy should be tackled by a theory which has the purpose of being relevant to what teachers have to confront, i.e. how new knowledge is developed in their learners' mind and how they become able to correctly and appropriately use this knowledge.

Thus, he starts by referring to cognitive learning theory and posits that it views language learning as the acquisition of a complex skill (Anderson, 1982: 403; 1983: 3f.; 261). As such it demands from the learner the ability to perform operations which, as a result of practice, have become automatic. Various information-processing techniques have to be used to achieve this end. However, Ellis states that although this learning theory provides a consistent explanation of the development of the ability to make use of L2 knowledge –i.e. proficiency– being thus highly appropriate for one of the teachers' concerns, on the other hand it is insubstantial with respect to explaining how this knowledge is achieved to start with –i.e. it fails to account for the linguistic factors that impinge on L2 learning. Cognitive theory deals with how new knowledge is represented in the learner's mind, i.e. in short-term memory first and in long-term memory later on. When information is in the latter kind of storage, the learner initially does not have access to it in all kinds of language use but only in controlled situations. This information which has at first only been available through controlled processing –i.e. mental operations undertaken with great effort and slowly– ends up via automatization of memory nodes being handled without difficulty and spontaneously. This way of accounting for learning through an information processing model explains why learners vary in their ability to perform different tasks.

Another important distinction to be made is that between declarative –i.e. knowing 'that'– and procedural knowledge –i.e. knowing 'how'– (Anderson, 1982: 370; 1983: 215ff.). Here again an account is made of how new knowledge becomes automatic. Broadly speaking, controlled processing would correspond to declarative knowledge and automatic processing to procedural knowledge. As the information-processing abilities of human beings are limited, certain kinds of knowledge have to be activated rapidly and easily. It should be noted, however, that while declarative knowledge involves conscious attention on the part of the learner, controlled processing may or may not involve having conscious awareness. Also when new information is acquired the learner's knowledge system is restructured. Ellis posits that this cognitive view of L2 acquisition assumes that L2 learning is not of a different kind from any other complex skill learning. For it to be a valid explanation of L2 learn-

ing, he continues, it should be irrefutably demonstrated that language is not a special faculty of the human mind and therefore constitutes a general skill. On the other hand, L2 knowledge which has become automatized for comprehension and production has also become proceduralized –i.e. it can be employed in different tasks which make different demands on the learner’s use of acquired knowledge, e.g. formal and informal language use.

Ellis also refers to Bialystok’s cognitive model of L2 acquisition (Bialystok, 1978; 1979; 1981; 1982; 1983; 1985; 1988; 1990; Bialystok and Sharwood Smith, 1985) where language proficiency is conceptualized according to an analyzed dimension –i.e. the awareness the learner has of the structure of his linguistic knowledge, e.g. his propositional mental representation of this knowledge, which may or may not be conscious to the learner himself and which occurs after the initial stages of L2 learning has been accomplished, since in them there is only unanalyzed linguistic knowledge– and an automatic factor –i.e. the easiness with which he can access his L2 knowledge and therefore exercise a fluent performance. The analyzed dimension is obtained as learning advances. Although the degree of analyticity does not involve consciousness, it does however make meta-lingual knowledge possible, i.e. the learner will be able to operate on it and hence use it in formal language use (Bialystok, 1988: 40). Practice will be the means by which automaticity is gained. As Bialystok states, “... development involves achieving an analyzed understanding of and automatic access to information which was already known in less specialized forms.” (Bialystok, 1982: 183).

In spite of the fact that Ellis recognizes how important cognitive theory is in accounting for how L2 learning occurs, he nevertheless posits its shortcomings in the two following respects. First to deal with the well attested acquisitional sequences in the language learning process –i.e. word order rules in German or word order rules in English like inversion-interrogatives. Secondly to be able to explain the role of explicit knowledge. As noted earlier, the former cannot be subverted by instruction, which lies powerless against them. Ellis points out that according to cognitive learning theory language learning and use are like other kinds of skill learning and use (O’Malley et al., 1987: 288; Anderson, 1982: 403; 1983: 3ff.), a fact which has not yet been convincingly proved. And this is why he takes from cognitive learning theory what it can offer –i.e. learners develop their proficiency in the L2 by exercising their ability to use this knowledge in different language tasks and in different kinds of language use. However he also needs to take into account how to explain the way in which acquisition of new L2 knowledge is attained, i.e. how it enters interlanguage. He recalls that explicit knowledge refers to the knowledge that is consciously represented in the learner’s mind and about which he can talk. Any instructed language learning theory, he carries on, should be able to explicitly state the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge. As noted above (Bialystok, 1988: 40), analyticity is not linked to consciousness, since there is enough research evidence to indicate that a L2 can be acquired subconsciously both by children and adults. However, Ellis contends that explicit knowledge –i.e. formal instruction– does play a role in grammar development and therefore fosters L2 acquisition.

He distinguishes between explicit and implicit knowledge. The former is conscious and declarative, the latter subconscious and procedural. Each is considered to be different in kind and to be stored separately in the brain. These two knowledge types are also postulated as dichotomous, i.e. no direct interface is posited between

them. It is thought that learners can access both kinds of knowledge with different degrees of automaticity, hence implicit knowledge is not necessarily fully automatic. It is also thought that both kinds of knowledge can be acquired either explicitly first and then implicitly or vice versa. However, only implicit knowledge is acquired in developmental sequences.

As a result of recognizing that L2 knowledge is differentiated, it is argued that pedagogical input is relevant to interlanguage construction because not only different input kinds provide different kinds of knowledge but, more important, they are central to achieve them. It is also posited that control is separate from knowledge and that it applies to both kinds of knowledge. Its development allows accurate and fluent performance. It is stressed that both meaning-focused instruction –i.e. experiencing language– and form-focused instruction –i.e. studying it– will cater for implicit and explicit knowledge, since there is no simple correlation between the latter and explicit knowledge and the former and implicit knowledge. Both will allow for the development of control. Finally it is noted that the learner's affective and cognitive orientation to learning –i.e. his learning style– will affect the course of learning.

Although Ellis underlines the lack of any simple correlation between form-focused instruction and explicit knowledge, he nevertheless admits that this kind of instruction enhances its acquisition. Both form-focused and meaning-focused instruction are thought to foster the acquisition of implicit knowledge. Meaning-focused instruction is considered the principal one for this kind of knowledge as it provides input for processing –i.e. through scaffolding (Faerch, 1985) or comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985)– and opportunities for output on the part of the learner. It is noted, however, that even when the conditions of attention and readiness are met, for input to become intake, other requirements are also necessary, i.e. the cognitive mechanisms that determine which features are attended to (e.g. sentence-medially elements) and the linguistic factors that specify whether the feature which has been attended to is in fact learnable (e.g. the existence or non-existence of a hierarchy of linguistic processing operations). Form-focused instruction can serve to acquire implicit knowledge providing the teachability constraints that are imposed on some linguistic structures are taken into account.

In relation to achieving control over L2 knowledge, Ellis favours meaning-focused instruction over sheer controlled practice. In his view, only the regular use of the target language in real communication activities will allow the learner to automatize his L2 knowledge and to develop the strategic competence he needs to make up for the lack of knowledge he still has –i.e. accuracy and fluency.

As far as the role of explicit knowledge is concerned, it is argued that although it does not turn into implicit knowledge –i.e. a non-interface position– which is the final aim of most language teaching, it is nevertheless of prime importance due to its function of acquisition facilitator. That is, it sensitizes the learner about L2 features which would otherwise pass unnoticed (Schmidt and Frota, 1986). This enhances the process of acquisition which will nevertheless be subjected to the constraints imposed by the mental cognitive and linguistic processing faculties of the learner. Finally, the learner's output is also considered to add favourably to the learning process both by making the learner develop his grammatical competence, fully taxing his existing linguistic resources –i.e. Swain's (1985) 'pushed output' hypothesis– and by forming part of the total input he is exposed to and that has to be processed.

EVALUATION

The theory for instructed L2 learning that Ellis proposes in this book draws both on cognitive theory applied to L2 acquisition –i.e. Bialystok’s Model discussed above– and on linguistic processing –i.e. Meisel et al.’s (1981) Bidimensional Model of L2 acquisition and Pienemann’s (1984) Teachability Hypothesis– in order to simultaneously address proficiency and competence. That is, it aims to deal with the two burning issues which concern teachers: (1) how new linguistic knowledge is acquired –competence– and (2) how ability to use this knowledge is developed –proficiency. In this way he acknowledges that L2 acquisition is determined both by linguistic and cognitive factors, and sets up his theory accordingly.

Notes

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