

Teaching English as a Second Language = Theory + Methods + Creativity

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Abstract- This study proposes that the pedagogical procedures within the genre of Teaching English as a Second Language should not only gain from the rich theoretical resources and the vast repertoire of methodological approaches available it should also tap the creative powers of the teaching practitioners. Merging tenets of Behaviorism with Innatism in the Interaction Theory and adapting theories on Second Language Acquisition the second language teaching/learning environment discussed aims to maximize acquisition and lower the affective filters of the learners. Principled Eclecticism provides the methodological foundation for cooperative learning and formative peer assessment with focused corrective feedback provide remedial support and an opportunity for the learners to reevaluate their work and engage in timely adjustments. The session aims at interpsychological cognitive development with peers/teacher and individual intrapsychological cognitive enhancement in language skills.

Index Terms- Interaction Theory, principled eclecticism, cooperative peer assessment, focused corrective feedback

Behaviorism^[2], states that children learn a language mainly through repetition, imitation and habit formation. Chomsky (1959)^[3] deviating from the tenets of Behaviorism introduces the Innate Hypothesis. Chomsky (1993: 519)^[4] states that ‘Language learning is not really something that the child does; it is something that happens to the child placed in an appropriate environment, much as the child’s body grows and matures in a predetermined way when provided with appropriate nutrition and environmental stimulation’. He raises the argument that if children learn language by imitation ‘why do they say things they have never heard before?’ Introducing the parameters Language Acquisition Device (LAD) or Universal Grammar (UG) Chomsky states that the LAD is the ability to discover the underlying rules of a language system. This device contains the main rules for all possible human languages and he called this set of common rules UG which is innate to a child’s biological endowment. Concurring Lightbown and Spada (2006: 16)^[5] state that the LAD is like an imaginary ‘black box’ existing somewhere in the brain and thought to contain only the principles which are universal to all natural languages. Merging tenets of Behaviorism and Innatism the Interactionist theory recognizes that both environmental and biological factors are important in language development. For example interactionists believe that language is a byproduct of the children’s social interactions with more knowledgeable people in their lives and the innate ability to acquire language as illustrated below.

I. INTRODUCTION

T1.1 The interactionist hypothesis

The Interaction Theory of language development by Vygotsky (1978)^[1] is a compromise between the Innatist and the Behaviorist theories. While Skinner’s theory of

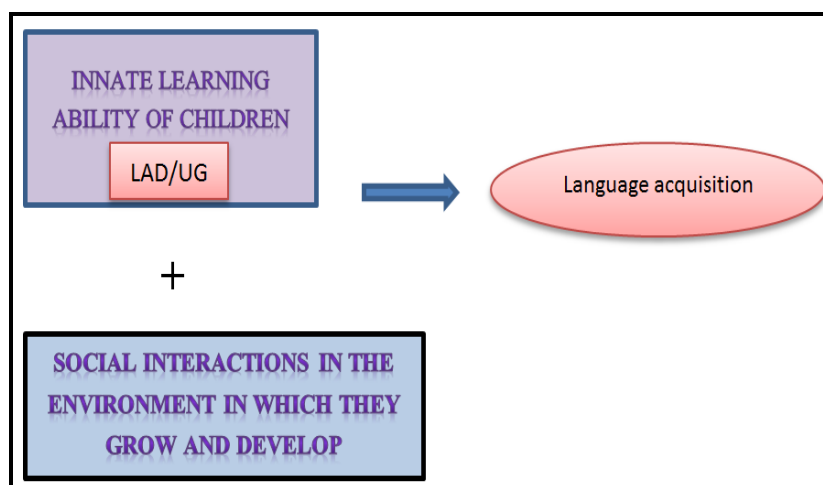


Figure 1: Combining Behaviorist and Innate hypotheses to illustrate how a language is acquired

Thus interactionism postulates that children acquire language through their innate language abilities to extract the rules of the language from their environment and construct the phonology, semantics, and syntax of their native language. This innate language ability is the ability to identify patterns in language, formulate rules about those patterns, and then apply them to new utterances (Rowe & Levine, 2006: 235)^[6].

1.2 Major themes in the Interactionist hypothesis

- i. According to Vygotsky (1978)^[7] social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. 'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapyschological).'
- ii. At the interpsychological level the child interacts with a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The MKO could be a teacher or older adult, but the MKO could also be peers, a younger person. In the modern world technology especially computers too can become a MKO.
- iii. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) stretches the child's ability at solving a problem independently and moves the child to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration. According to Vygotsky, learning occurred in this zone. Within the ZPD a child's linguistic development progresses from *the current* to *the unknown*. For optimal outcome the child should work within the ZPD in collaboration with a MKO. Thus much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. According to McLeod (2007)^[8] ZPD is where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given allowing the child to develop skills they will then use on their own in the process of developing higher mental functions. Thus Vygotsky proposes that ZPD is where learners construct the new language through socially mediated interaction.

Thus Vygotsky's observations proved that

- i. Children doing tasks on their own rarely did as well as when they were working in collaboration with a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The MKO can be an adult, a teacher or the child's peers.
- ii. Even when the MKO was not teaching them how to perform the task, the process of engagement with

the adult enabled them to refine their thinking or their performance to make it more effective.

Agreement comes from Shannon (2005)^[9] who states that the basic concept in interactionism is that children have some innate knowledge of the structure of language, but also require meaningful interaction with others.

1.3 From first language acquisition to second language acquisition

Applying the tenets of interactionism to second language learning Atherton (2013)^[10] states that skill construction is based on three premises 1. *Can do alone* 2. *Can do with help* 3. *Cannot do yet*. The ZPD centers around *can do with help*. This is not a state where learners stagnate but a stage prior to *Can do alone*. The Interactionist theory was resourceful in revolutionizing the TESL classroom moving it from a locale where the teacher disseminated knowledge to a reciprocal knowledge constructing experience between the teacher and the learners. The learning contexts considered students to be equal stakeholders who perform an active part in the process of learning and take responsibility for achieving the objectives. The teacher and the learners collaborate in order to help facilitate meaning construction. The entry of Krashen's (1981)^[11] five hypotheses shed more light on how second language learners acquire a new language.

1.3.1 The Acquisition-Learning distinction

Krashen (1982: 10)^[12] states that adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language.

a) Language acquisition

- i. This process is similar, if not identical, to the way children develop first language ability.
- ii. It is a subconscious process as the language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication.
- iii. Correct grammar *feels* right, and errors feel wrong, even if the learners do not consciously know what rule was violated.
- iv. As it is subconscious acquisition error correction has little or no effect.
- v. The acquisition-learning hypothesis claims that not only children but adults too can acquire language by accessing the same natural LAD that children use.

b) Language Learning

- i. Conscious.
- ii. Error correction supposedly helps the learners to alter their conscious mental representation of a rule and learn the right form of the rule.

1.3.2 The Input Hypothesis

Krashen (1982: 21)^[13] makes the following claim on the input hypothesis:

Acquisition occurs when one is exposed to language that is comprehensible and that contains $i + 1$. i stands for the acquirer's current level of proficiency. He is able to move to a higher stage by understanding language containing $i + 1$ (where "+1" stands for language which is slightly beyond the acquirer's current level of competence). A necessary condition to move from stage i to stage $i + 1$ is that the acquirer understands input that contains $i + 1$, where "understand" means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message.

- i. The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning.
- ii. We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a beyond our current level of competence ($i + 1$). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information.
- iii. When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, $i + 1$ will be provided automatically.
- iv. Production ability emerges. It is not taught directly.

1.3.3 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

The Affective Filter hypothesis states how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process.

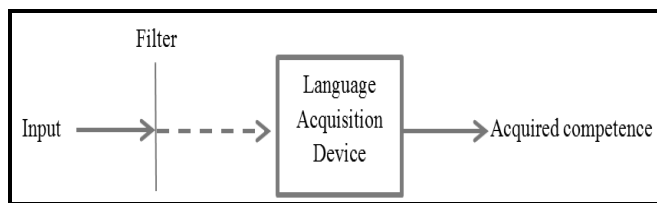


Figure 2: Operation of the Affective Filter Krashen (1982: 32)

Identifying affective variables Krashen (1982: 32)^[14] states 'The Affective Filter hypothesis implies that our pedagogical goals should not only comprise of supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter.' He further states that three factors regulate the Affective Filter during second language acquisition.

- i. *Motivation*: Performers with high motivation generally do better.
- ii. *Self-confidence*: Performers with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to do better
- iii. *Anxiety*: Low anxiety appears to be conducive, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety.

Merging Krashen's (1982)^[15] Input Hypothesis with the Interactionist Theory this study identifies stage i as the *Can do alone* or current knowledge. The move from stage i to stage $i + 1$ is to enter the ZPD. At the ZPD the acquirer cognizes input that contains $i + 1$ under the guidance of a MKO. The following figure is an adaption from Atherton (2013)^[16] and illustrates the progression of learning.

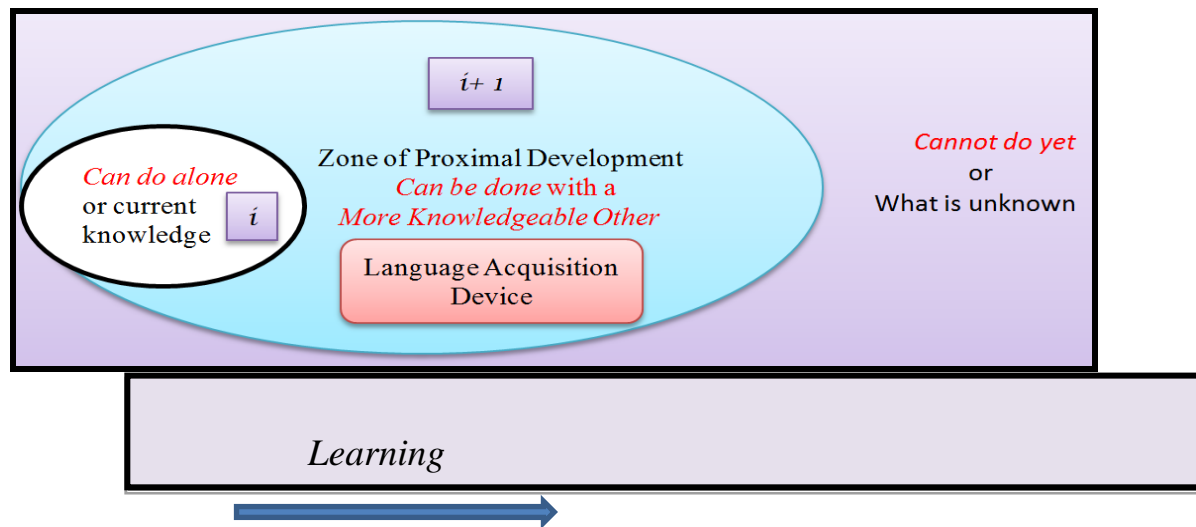


Figure 3: The progression of learning

Combining the progression of learning above with the second language acquisition model by Krashen (1982)^[17] this study visualizes a second language learner classroom which aims to teach the present continuous tense.

Comprehensible input in this instance is a lesson plan to elaborate the present continuous tense. It anticipates

creating a classroom environment based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Thus for optimal function at the ZPD a low filter is emphasized generating high motivation, enhancing self-confidence and lowering the anxiety level.

At the ZPD the learners work with the guidance of More Knowledgeable Others. This guidance indoctrinates

Krashen's (1982: 10)^[18] Acquisition-Learning distinction and the interaction between the MKO/s and in the language acquirers is based on maximizing acquisition. Thus prioritizing Acquisition over Learning the classroom environment endeavors to make production ability emerge as 'a subconscious process'. The language acquirers 'are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication' (ibid). But experience denotes that all learner populations in a language teaching environment consist of the dichotomy: Good and Weak

learners. As the classroom gives priority to acquisition it is assumed that the Good learners would ideally be more on a knowledge acquisition mode and learnt knowledge will be less. On the other hand the Weak learners are expected to be more on a conscious learnt knowledge mode and will engage in extensive monitoring prior to producing output. This study constructs the following Figure to illustrate the suggested language teaching/learning environment where input is in the form of a lesson on present continuous tense and is diversely processed by Good and Weak learners.

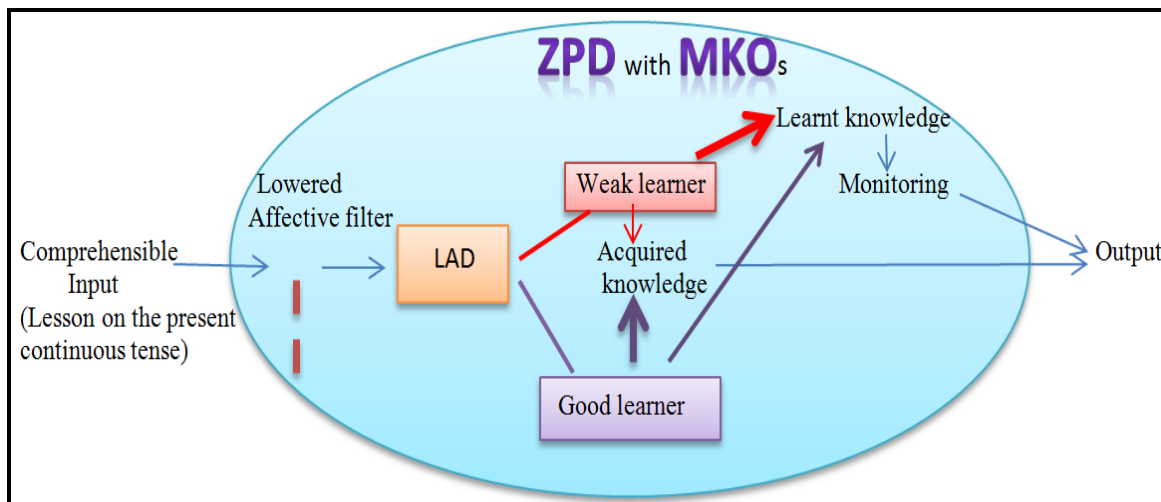


Figure 4: An adaptation of second language acquisition model by Krashen (1982) to illustrate a second language teaching/learning environment.

Within this language teaching/learning environment to maximize acquisition the teaching methodology is Eclecticism but it utilizes methodological approaches available strictly in a principled manner.

II. THE METHOD: PRINCIPLED ECLECTICISM

Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at present is based on an amalgamation of many diverse methods. Larsen-Freeman (2000)^[19] recognizes that there is no single acceptable way to go about teaching language today. Introducing the term Principled Eclecticism she defines it as a desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language teaching. Eclecticism makes the lesson planner deviate from reliance upon a single approach to teaching where the planner is constricted within its limited number of techniques. Furthermore the students' performance can become mechanical and as a result they cannot reap maximum benefits from the learning. By the inclusion of the term *Principled* Larsen-Freeman (ibid) cautions against the haphazard use of a random mix of multitude methods available within the genre of TESL.

Within the field of TESL methodology traditional structural approaches such as Grammar Translation, and Audio-lingual Method; Communicative Methods as the

Communicative Approach, Total Physical Response, Natural Approach and modern innovative approaches as the Silent Way and Suggestopedia all carry strengths as well as weaknesses (Larsen-Freeman, 2000^[20]; Richards and Rodgers 2001^[21]; Wesche and Skehan, 2002^[22]) provide detailed descriptions of these methods and approaches). Thus principled eclecticism ideally is a mix of structural approaches with communicative use of language appropriate to the learner population. Guided by the tenets of Principled Eclecticism and scaffolding the relevant theory discussed this study creates a lesson plan where intuition and innovative ideas aim at developing an instrument appropriate to the target student population of this study.

III. CREATIVITY: THE LESSON PLAN

Armed with the theory and methodology as a TESL practitioner I seek to include creativity into a lesson plan with the aim of recreating real-life social and functional situations in the classroom to guide students toward communicative competence.

3.1 Aim and Objectives

Graves (2000)^[23] states that goals are general intentions of teaching and objectives are specific, aims at cognitive,

psychomotor and affective domains of learning and link observable behavior to teaching and assessment. Thus the aim of this session is to make learners use the present continuous tense with minimum/no errors in tense or tense contradiction.

Objectives: At the end of this session students will be able to:

- o Outline the form of the present continuous tense
- o Assemble sentence structures to describe an ongoing process and construct a peer composition using the present continuous tense
- o Analyze and evaluate peer performance in the present continuous tense
- o Justify decisions on peer correction
- o Create a story line for an ongoing process

3.2 The learners

The target population consists of 20 low/intermediate proficiency first year undergraduates. Each year undergraduates place high priority on learning grammar in the pre-entry needs analysis.

3.3 The lesson plan (Time frame: one hour)

3.3.1 Stage I: Recapping the structures of the present continuous tense (05 minutes)

The material: The form of present continuous as a grid and a short exercise.

Exposition: The present continuous tense is sometimes called the present progressive and is generally used to explain an event that is in progress at the current moment. Here is how to form the present continuous tense in English.

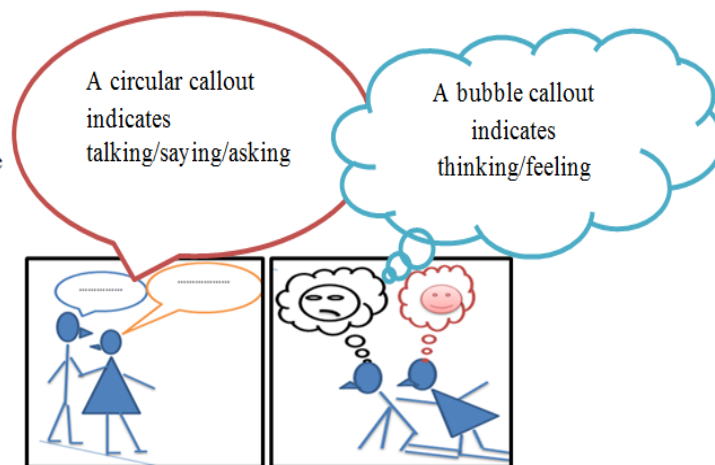
Table 1: Grid depicting the structures of the present continuous tense

Structure of present continuous		
Positive	Negative	Question
I'm thinking of her.	I'm not thinking of her.	Am I thinking of her?
You're thinking of her.	You're not thinking of her.	Are you thinking of her?
We're watching them.	We're not watching them.	Are we watching them?
They're watching them.	They're not watching them.	Are they watching them?
He's talking to her.	He's not talking to her.	Is he talking to her?
She's listening to him.	She's not listening to him.	Is she listening to him?
It's interesting/irritating.	It's not / it isn't interesting/ irritating.	Is it interesting/ irritating?

Activity I:

Complete the sentences with the present continuous tense form of the verb in the brackets.

1. Anil and Mala hands. (hold)
2. They (talk)
3. Sadun and Dilmi (watch).
4. Dilmi thinks that it..... (interest)
5. She happy. (feel)
6. Sadun finds it..... (irritate)
7. He is happy. (not, feel)



3.3.1.1 Methodological approach: Stage I

The session aims at utilizing the Principled Eclectic Method. Key concepts in the Audiolingual Method are employed to make students recap the rules of the present continuous tense formation. Drills help students to differentiate between structures and they are reinforced

inductively. Then expressing the rule, questions are asked to guide the learners through a dialogue which introduces the lesson's sentence patterns. In this instance the MKO can be the teacher or might be cherry picked from among the learners. This is in

agreement with a fundamental methodological principle in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which favors of a *focus on form* approach. This approach to explicit grammar teaching emphasizes a form-meaning connection followed by elaborating the grammar form taught within

contexts and through communicative tasks. Based on Grammar Translation Method difficult vocabulary (for example *irritate*) is presented with a translation equivalent as it accelerates comprehension.

3.3.2 Stage II (40 minutes)

The material: This section uses a cartoon created to suit the target population for the purpose of exploration and elaboration. The instrument, Figure 5 below has 5 frames.

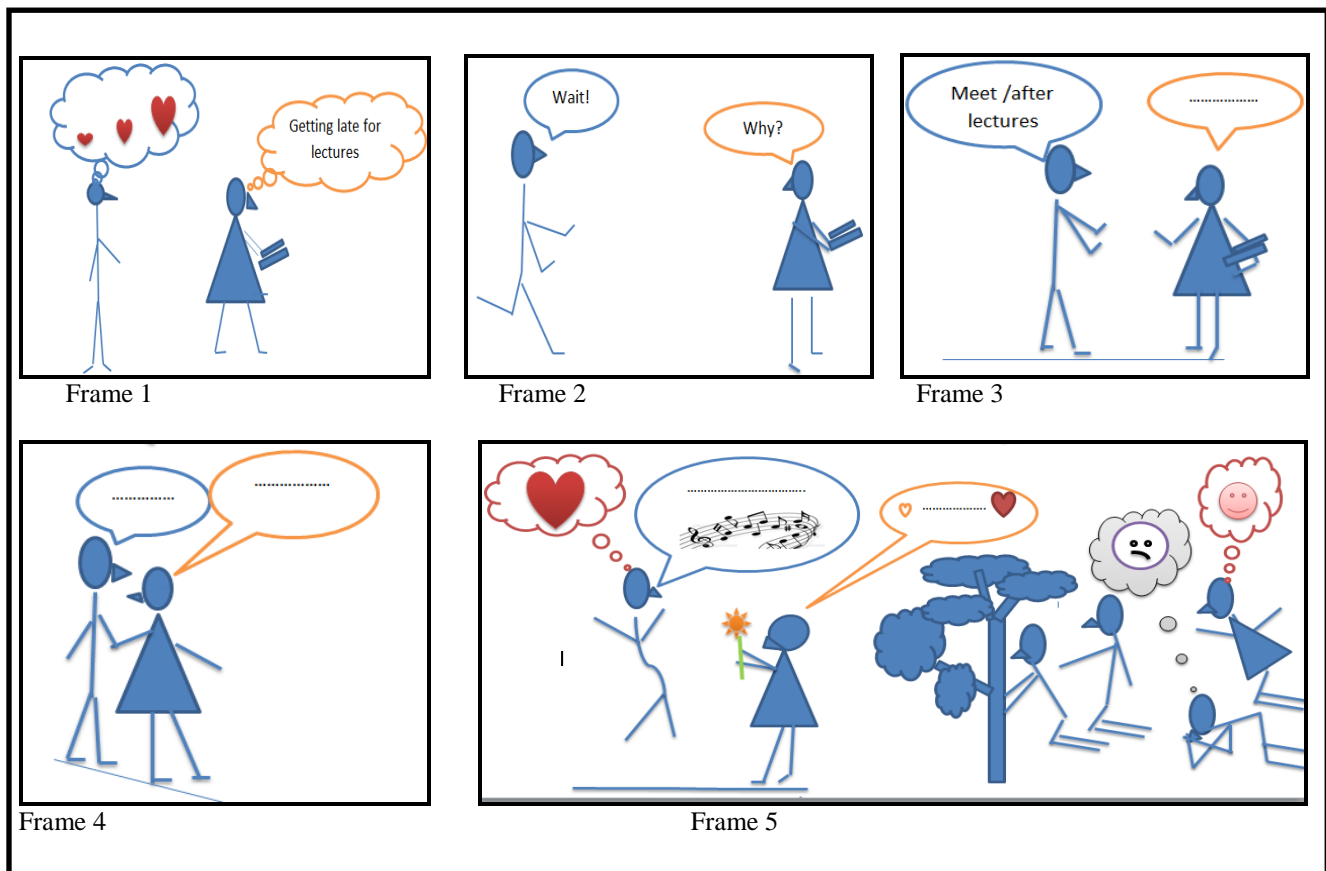


Figure 5: Instrument for communicative activities

Procedure: The cartoon frames are placed outside the classroom in five different spots which are easy the access. This creates an information gap. The learners form 4 heterogeneous groups of 5. Seating plan allows for easy to and fro movement and good eye contact between listeners and speakers during group work. Additionally the arrangement provides feasibility for eye contact with the teacher by slight alteration of the positioning of the chairs while remaining within the group. The procedure is based on even participation at the right language level. Thus the task is designed so that students can complete it successfully with the language that they have + one step higher with the help of a MKO who is a group member. Member domination in discussions is minimized by strategic task allocation. When necessary, the teacher may interfere to guarantee equal opportunities for students of different levels.

Instructions: Each member of the group is given a number 1-5 which allots the respective cartoon frame. They are allotted roles. For example when group member 1 is the Runner cum Communicator of Information others (2-5) take the role of Interrogator, Writer, Editor and Presenter. The teacher introduces each of the command cards in Figure 6 to keep the time frame intact during the five cycles of activity and explains the physical response each card demands. At the end of each cycle a minimum of 5 sentences should be constructed using the present continuous tense for the respective frame. Learners could make other sentence structures which would help cohesion but they will not undergo assessment.

The following command cards are explained and used as non-verbal forms of communication.

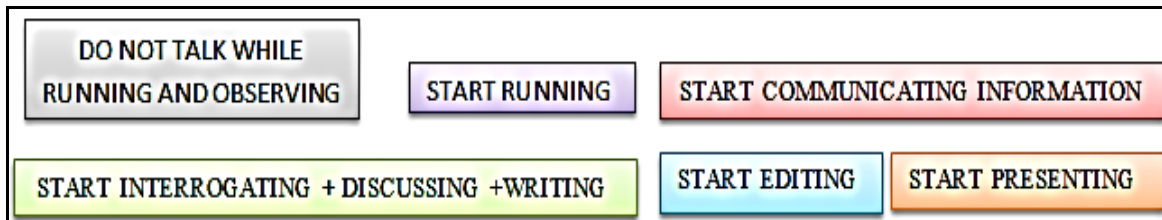


Figure 6: Command cards

There are 5 cycles for the 5 cartoon frames. The first 4 cycles are of 5 minutes duration while the last cycle for frame 5 is allotted 10 minutes (total = 30 minutes). The first Command card states that the Runners cannot talk while running or observing. During the first cycle for example as the command states START RUNNING member 1 of each group becomes the Runner runs to Frame 1 observes the ongoing action gets back to the group and communicates information. The Runners try to find answers to questions such as ‘Who are the people / characters? What are they doing? What are they thinking? What are they saying to each other? What happens next?’ Second members of the groups become Interrogators. After/during discussion the third member who is the Writer writes the five sentences using the present continuous tense for the respective frame. Other sentence structures which would help cohesion too can be added but will not undergo assessment. The Editors of each group run to the Frame I and check whether editing/additional information is required. Each of these actions is controlled by the Command cards which go up at one minute durations. But this stage is time flexible. For example the Editors can run and check the frames while the discussion is ongoing to clarify information if the Runner is in doubt. Awareness is created among the learners that time management, dynamism and soft skills are needed for optimal output as the activities within each of the first 4 frames end in 5 minutes. The last frame is given 10 minutes as the content is more complex. The learners are advised to use the time judiciously to reevaluate the sentences produced for the first 4 frames.

At the end of the each cycle the presenter of each group reads the sentences to the class (0.5 minutes x 4 groups x 5 presenters = 10 minutes). Through the presenter the teacher gets an idea of global errors. During the 5 cycles where the 5 frames are covered the roles of Runner, Interrogator, Writer, Editor and Presenter move clockwise. At the end of this activity each group will have constructed 5 frame cards each with a minimum of 5 sentences containing a present continuous tense form. Furthermore each member of the group would have played the roles of Runner, Interrogator, Writer, Editor and Presenter.

3.3.2.1 Methodological approach: Stage II

Stage II of this session too aims at utilizing a principled eclectic method which facilitates the language learning process. As too many unknown vocabulary items will raise the affective filter of the students and will tempt them to use

the first language the need for new words is kept minimal. Though emphasis is on learning to communicate through the target language the use of the first language is not prohibited if a student is struggling for a word. For accessing the English equivalent MKO aid can be sought. A key feature in the Total Physical Response approach: nonverbal aid for communication is used during Command card usage where students react to language in the present continuous subconsciously. This reduces student anxiety and stress. Furthermore they interact with props and learn to associate them with motor activity in the learning environment.

The methodological approach in Stage II adheres to the principles of CLT too. One of the instructional practices promoted by CLT is that material should reflect real-life situations and demands. Thus inventiveness in material preparation is pedagogically necessary to create meaningful, comprehensible input. In communicative language classrooms the focus shifts from teacher-led to student-centered language application and using a cooperative and collaborative learning mode is recognized as a strong facilitator of learning. Information gap creation in the activities result in each runner communicating information to the rest of the group who do not know the contents of the cartoon frame while the others listen, interrogate, discuss and take turns to write, edit and present. Thus during group activities the language focus encompasses all four skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Furthermore during cooperative activities Weimer (2002)^[24] identifies the following as crucial: Positive interdependence among learners in respect to resources and task accomplishment; Face-to-face interaction in small groups; Individual accountability for participation or internalization of the relevant knowledge or skills. The methodological approach used during group activities in Stage II satisfies all three criteria. Cooperative problem-solving behavior is enhanced as peer performance is analyzed during intergroup work. If a problem surfaces during the course of communication solutions are found as a team.

3.3.3 Stage III: Cooperative peer assessment and focused corrective feedback

The function of assessment is to check whether the aim and objectives of the session have been met. According to Biggs (2003)^[25] assessment tasks tell us how well students have attained the intended learning outcomes as illustrated below.

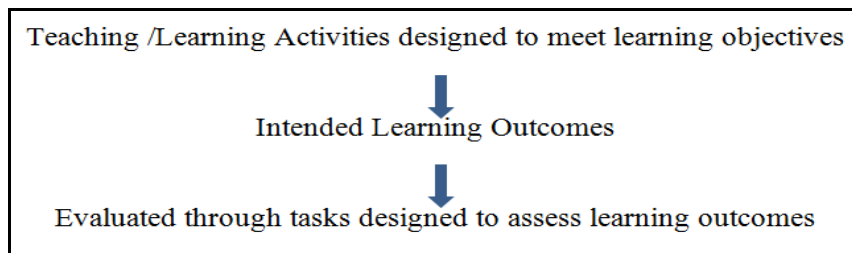


Figure 7: Assessment of intended learning outcomes

Based on the above this session selects Formative Assessment procedures from within the repertoire of pedagogical evaluation practices. It offers the information needed and provides remedial support to the learners so that timely adjustments can be made. To assess learning outcomes of a session which aims to teach a grammar form Sheen (2007)^[26] endorses the use of Focused corrective feedback where errors in the specific grammatical structure are targeted for identification and correction. Thus Cooperative peer assessment for this session is a Formative Assessment where corrective feedback is given by peers.

3.3.3.1 Procedure

Activity (10 minutes): amongst the 4 groups two groups exchange the constructed 5 frame card sets. Each member gets one frame. The words Reject, Accept and Track changes are introduced. The markers assess the sentences mark Reject/Accept, suggest changes and return the card set to the owner group. The owner groups Track changes suggested for the Rejected sentences and Reject/Accept the changes.

Table 2: A sample frame card after assessment and the grading scheme

Frame I: Sentences	Assessment	Suggested change	Circle	Track changes	Circle
1. Anil is looking at Mala.	Accept				
2. She not looking at Anil.	Reject	She is not looking at Anil.		Accept ✓	
3. Mala is carrying some books.	Accept				
4. She is thinking I am getting late for lecturers.	Reject	She is thinking that she is getting late for lecturers		Reject ?	
5.					

Grading scheme			
# of correct sentences	0, 1	2, 3	4, 5

The Reject- Reject sentences are written on the board and each marker justifies the suggested change while the owners of the frames justify their decisions to Reject the Rejections. The teacher acts as the MKO and finalizes the correct version and reconsiders the smiley allotment.

3.3.4 Stage IV: Recapping session (05 minutes)

3.3.5 Stage V: Take-home individual task: Write the story in the cartoon. Give it a title. (10 marks)

During this stage the learners create a storyline for the ongoing process in the cartoon frames as an individual Take-home task. This hones intrapsychological cognitive skills as the final output is a self-creation. As it is a mark allotting task the creativity in each learner will endeavor to couch the sentences constructed for each frame within a stylistic whole. This encourages learners to assess their understanding of the taught grammar form and fine tune abilities of elaboration. Furthermore an individual task provides the teacher an opportunity to evaluate each student’s understanding of the grammar form taught.

IV. SUMMARY STATEMENT

The global aim of the session is to make learners self discover that the process of learning is not only accumulating knowledge and skills. Solving communicative problems and monitoring their own work guide the students along a path of inquiry and generates new patterns of thinking where the final outcome is evolving knowledge through self-discovery. Thus the cognitive development is interpsychological as well as intrapsychological.

One limitation of the session is the tightness of the time frame. This can be overcome by dividing the lesson plan into two sessions by moving the session from Stage III: Cooperative peer assessment and focused corrective feedback onwards to a follow-up second session. Such a follow-up lesson could include a song which is supposedly sung at frame 5. My target is ‘A Whole New World’ with lyrics given as a handout. The *Aladdin* or the Peabo Bryson and Regina Belle version provide opportunity for a listening task where the learners fill in the blank with continuous tenses. The Sing-along karaoke version can be downloaded from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLZIya_h_4 and used in the

classroom. This makes the learners acquire additional vocabulary items: Soaring, tumbling, freewheeling, dreaming, thrilling etc. Furthermore though the lesson plan targets a tertiary level learner population it could be creatively adapted to any audience.

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