The integration of form-focused instruction within communicative language teaching: Instructional options

The Integration of Form-focused Instruction within Communicative Language Teaching: Instructional Options
Dina Abdel Salam El-Dakhs

Abstract

The strong versions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) undermine the role of formal instruction in language learning and may even consider it detrimental. According to proponents of the strong CLT versions, learners pick up the language from interactions that focus on the semantic aspect of the language rather than its formal characteristics. Hence, teaching language forms is not recommended. This position has, however, faced harsh criticism over the last three decades. Compelling evidence (e.g., Millard, 2000) has showed that the sole focus on meaning may produce fluent learners who lack language accuracy. This evidence, supported by other significant hypotheses (e.g., Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis) and models (e.g., VanPatten’s Processing Model) called for the re-introduction of formal instruction in second language (L2) learning. The paper also surveys different lines of support for the integration of the approach known as Form-Focused Instruction within Communicative Language Teaching. Finally, the paper surveys various useful pedagogical techniques to support the successful FFI-CLT marriage in the English language classroom. The techniques are categorized under Ellis’s (1998) classification of instructional intervention.

Keywords

communicative language teaching; form-focused instruction; instructional options; English language learning; second language acquisition

Full Text:

PDF

References


The origins of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are to be found in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s. Until then, Situational Language represented the major British approach to teaching English as a foreign language. In Situational Language Teaching, language was taught by practicing basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities. British applied linguists emphasized another fundamental dimension of language that was inadequately addressed in current approaches to language teaching at that time - the functional and communicative p Focus on form and corrective feedback in communicative language teaching.

Form focused instruction refers to attention to the formal aspects of language. Long (1991:45-6) refers to focus on form as drawing “… students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication.” Focus on form derives from an assumed degree of similarity between first and second language acquisition positing that the two processes are both based on an exposure to comprehensible input arising from natural interaction. The effectiveness of focus on form instruction within a variety of instructional circumstances. I have chosen some studies and described the effectiveness of focus on form instructions. I have numbered them in order to make distinctions between them.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages, emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as the “Communicative Approach”. CLT provides vitality and motivation within the classroom. CLT is a learner centered approach. It capitalizes on the interests and needs of the learner. The communicative approach focuses on the use of language in everyday situations, or the functional aspects of language, and less on the formal structures. There must be a certain balance between the two. It gives priority to meanings and rules of use rather than to grammar and rules of structure.