

**Adolescent voices speak out:  
if only they would - if only they could**

**A case study**

**The interplay between linguistic and strategic  
competence in classrooms  
where modern languages are used**

**Volume one ←**

**by Do Coyle**

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## Abstract

This thesis focusses on groups of adolescent learners in two comprehensive schools. It explores the interplay between linguistic and strategic competence in classrooms where a foreign language is used i.e. in French or Spanish lessons and in geography classes where the foreign language is also used as a medium for instruction. In Part 1, the research is positioned within a contextual, conceptual and theoretical framework, underpinned by Vygotskian socio-cognitive principles.

Part 2 consists of an ethnographic-oriented case study at two sites. The study uses methodological triangulation to co-construct the learning environments from different perspectives, based on document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, lesson observations and the microgenetic analysis of student interaction during linguistic tasks analysed at both an inter- and intramental level. The thesis is built on the metaphor of language games and identifies strategic and linguistic moves which could potentially bring about changing the rules in order to enable an alternative game to be played.

The thesis leads the writer to argue for a re-conceptualisation of learner strategies based on the notion of 'strategic classrooms' and recommends the integration of 'alternative' linguistic and strategic 'moves' into everyday classroom practice if learners are to find a 'voice'.

D. Coyle. November, 1999

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D. Coyle. November 1999

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# **PROLOGUE**

## **THE RULES OF THE LANGUAGE GAME**

As a prologue to this thesis, I invite the reader to engage with the central metaphor of this study - that classroom language or discourse can be perceived as a 'language game'.

Wittgenstein (1958) introduced the notion that 'the speaking of language is part of an activity or a form of life' (1958: 11). In his view, such activities constitute 'language games', which have definite structures and moves, with certain rules and conventions.

Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman and Smith, Jr. (1966), subsequently built on this idea:

Learning to participate appropriately in various kinds of language activities is very much like learning to play a game. Players have to learn the rules, the purpose of the rules, and how the various parts of the game are related. Only by learning these rules can one play the game successfully.

(Bellack et al 1966: 3)

In their pioneering study, Bellack et al reported on a three year project 'to gain understanding of the special world of the classroom' (op cit: v) carried out in seven high schools in New York city. The focus of their research was on verbal interaction and language as the main instrument of communication in teaching. Fifteen different classes following a social studies programme were targeted. The study used the 'language game' metaphor as a framework, since this enabled classroom discourse to be classified, analysed and recorded in terms of 'pedagogical moves'.

Therefore, as a catalyst for investigating classroom discourse within the specific context of communication in and through a foreign language, I shall begin by presenting the findings of the 1966 study, some thirty three years ago, with a personal addendum. I intend in my own research study to identify, adapt and develop the dynamic of subsequent 'language games' since the original study. The summary which follows is

detailed, in order to provide the reader with an understanding of how a 'language game' might be structured and articulated.

<p><b>Extract one: Rules of the Language Game 1966</b> <b>(adapted from Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman and Smith, Jr.)</b></p>
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### **Introduction**

- The classroom game involves several players one of whom is the teacher and the remainder are students.
- The object of the game is to use and learn language.
- In this game there is not one winner and one loser. Instead there are relative degrees of winning and losing. For the player who is teacher, his or her winnings are a function of student performance. Student performance is calculated according to the quantity of learning usually measured by a test.
- The players follow complementary rules - one set for the teacher and one set for the students with little or no deviation.
- The style of play may differ between classes and between players, but it is the duty of the player who is teacher, to set the ground rules and ensure that these are obeyed. Thus the teacher has the dual role of both coach and referee.

- The students must try to learn the ground rules as quickly as possible even though these might not be evident.

## **General Rules**

There are five general rules

- The game consists of players making four types of pedagogical moves:

There are two types of initiatory moves -

1. structuring (STR)
2. soliciting (SOL)

And two types of reflexive moves -

3. responding (RES)
4. reacting (REA)

Reacting must account for almost half of the moves, the remainder being equally distributed.

- The teacher is the most active and dominant player.

The ratio of teacher talk to student talk is about 3:1 and the ratio of moves made is 3:2.

These ratios remain constant.

- *When the game is played within the modern language classroom, it is mainly led by the teacher. The teacher selects the content and determines what is to be said*



*by frequent use of structuring and soliciting moves.*

*Although occasionally students are encouraged to take on alternative roles, the substance of discourse is almost always pre-determined and consists mainly of reflexive moves (my own notes).*

- Whilst players are not prohibited from making evaluative or analytical statements, the rules encourage repetitive and empirical discourse. Occasionally, the teacher may attempt to elicit pseudo-evaluative reflexive moves.
- To find the score of an individual teacher, the wins and losses are calculated. This calculation is made by balancing the pass and failure rate of all the players on the test. Whilst several test failures may be offset by a number of brilliant test scores, the precise calculation will depend upon the context in which the game is played.

### **Rules for Soliciting and Responding: Pedagogical Moves 1 and 2**

These will constitute more than three-fifths of all moves made.

#### **Teacher Rules**

- The teacher's main role is to ensure that at least half of his or her moves are solicitations. These moves focus primarily on eliciting information and directing student activities.
- It is usual for only one student to respond to a teacher's move, *although in modern languages games, students are occasionally expected to move in unison.*



- The teacher is allowed to provide players with clues.

### Student Rules

- The student's main role is to ensure that at least two-thirds of all moves are responding moves.
- A student should expect to carry out substantive tasks in about three-fifths of moves and instructional tasks in two-fifths.
- A student is not usually expected to provide amplification, but is expected to solicit the teacher if necessary.

### Rules for Structuring: Pedagogical Move 3

- Structuring is a directive move which sets the context for classroom behaviour by launching or stopping interaction.
- Speakers of structuring moves generally set the context for some kind of language activity.
- The teacher structures less than he or she solicits or reacts.  
The teacher structures more than he or she responds.
- The student structures less than he or she solicits, responds or reacts.

The student rarely if ever structures.

#### **Rules for Reacting: Pedagogical Move 4**

- Almost all reactions are in response to the other pedagogical moves.
- The teacher makes approximately two reacting moves out of every five moves.  
Almost all teacher reactions are to student responses.  
Three quarters of all teacher reactions involve rating the students response most usually with 'good' or 'yes'.
- Students react twice as often to the teachers, as to each other. Students rarely react by rating moves of other students since this is the role of the teacher.

#### **Teaching Cycles**

A sequence of moves is called a teaching cycle.

- The basic rule of teaching cycles is that once set in motion they tend to remain in motion, and that a subsequent cycle will have the same characteristic as the previous one, ie a SOL, RES, REA cycle tends to increase the probability of a subsequent SOL, RES, REA.
- It is the teacher's role to initiate approximately eighty five percent of teaching cycles.

- Teachers generally follow a soliciting-responding interchange with a reacting move:
  - teacher initiates
  - student responds
  - teacher reacts (usually by evaluating student response)
- Students generally do not initiate teaching cycles.

## **Future Games**

Bellack's study concludes with the following advice:

One of the most important lines for continuing study concerns the reformulation of the antecedent-consequence of the nature of research in teaching, to recognize the need for descriptive studies both of classroom variables and of outcome variables. Instead of investigating various dimensions of classroom behaviour in relation to some arbitrary measure of 'learning,' it may be more useful in the long run to formulate investigations in terms of the general question, 'If a given set of events occurs in the classroom, then what are the observable outcomes'.

(op cit: 250)

## **Note**

In his book *Interaction in the Language Curriculum*, (1996), van Lier refers to Bellack's study and its influence on subsequent research in the field, notably Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Mehan (1979), Wells (1993) and his own work (1996).

## Extract two: Researcher Field Diary

### Thirty years on.....

#### Preliminary visit to school

As I knocked on the door of the year 9 History class, the teacher emerged smiling:  
*Bonjour, bonjour.... entrez, eh classe! Je vous présente Mme Coyle. Elle s'intéresse à votre travail...*

First impressions - a classroom full, full of 13 or 14 year old students - a plethora of different voices - *Bonjour Madame, bonjour, bonjour!*

My eyes fell on the only vacant seat- next to a large male student(AR).

DC *Cela vous gêne?*

AR *Non, non*

I sat down next to him. Glanced around the room. Students busy taking notes. Textbooks entitled *Guerre de 39-45* published by Hachette, strewn on tables. On the board:

*Une croix dont les quatre branches se terminent en forme de gamma majuscule. C'est un symbole de prospérité et de chance. Le mot veut dire 'bien-être'. On la trouvait il y a 2000 ans et après en Allemagne et aujourd'hui en Asie. En Allemagne nazie, la croix gammée est devenue le symbole nationale qui représentait aussi toute l'organisation anti-semite...*

Suddenly, a voice- directed at me...

AR *Madame, avez-vous vu Schindler's List?*

DC *Non, mais j'ai lu le livre Schindler's Ark.*

AR *Moi aussi. Je préfère le livre.....c'est plus réel, n'est-ce pas?*

Stunned silence on my part.....Male student-initiated response.....genuine reason for communication, relative to content of lesson....linguistically competent (correct form of address, 'vous' form of verb, correct choice of tense) with confident delivery and authentic accent.....expressing a personal view unsolicited by a teacher player move.. Pedagogical moves SOL, RES, REA- a familiar teaching cycle - EXCEPT the roles were reversed. The student player had made an initiating pedagogical move, the 'expert' player had responded. The student player had then reacted not with a reflexive move to end the teaching cycle and close down communication, but with another type of initiating move designed to sustain the teaching cycle and extend the 'language game'.

Quite simply the rules of the 'language game' had been broken.



I should like to dedicate this thesis to all learners and teachers who have broken and continue to break the rules of the 'language game', in the quest for alternative 'games' with alternative rules and alternative outcomes. The search had begun...



# CHAPTER ONE

## DEFINING THE CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK



*The purpose of this chapter is to give the reader a sense of place where language games are currently played. This will also guide the reader towards an understanding of the powerful impact which 'rule breaking' can have on the observer.*

### **Part I: Modern Language Teaching and Learning** **Painting the picture - current issues**

There have been unprecedented changes and developments in the field of modern language teaching and learning in the past thirty years (Hawkins 1996). A growing realisation that a national competence in languages other than English was essential for Britain to prosper in a dynamic, economic and technological global environment, has precipitated a drive for language learning as an entitlement for all young people and an ensuing grassroots interest in appropriate classroom methodologies. Moreover, changes in the national examinations system in the 1980s led to a major shift from 'traditional' grammar-based approaches to those which emphasised oral communication and paved the way for the *Education Reform Act* (1988) and the introduction of *Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum* (DES 1991).

However, despite the optimism and enthusiasm which pervaded innovative curriculum development in language teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, suitably exemplified by the Graded Test Movement (GOML), regional curriculum development centres backed by

local supportive Advisory Services and buoyant membership of teacher professional associations, the impetus does not appear to have either been sustained or to have led to a dramatic improvement in national linguistic competence within the workforce.

Whilst such a pessimistic view may not be endorsed by all those involved in the teaching and learning of foreign languages, my personal belief is based on the premise that at both the macro and micro level of functioning, extraneous forces have militated against the continued thrust of curriculum development, currently typified by a reactive rather than proactive ethos. It is however useful to position the current state of modern foreign language teaching and learning within the context of recent developments at the national and international level as well as at the classroom level, in order to give the reader an insight into the background of this thesis and an understanding of my own commitment to improving adolescent language learning experiences. Therein lies a desire to redress the current trend towards a view of language teaching practice which:

de-professionalises language teachers as it underestimates the indirect role of more elaborate conceptual thinking about language teaching in continuing professional development and plays to the populist notions of teaching as being all about common sense and the local context.

(Grenfell 1997: 32)

## Macro Level

### The European context: Maastricht and beyond

In recent years the European map has changed considerably, not only in a geographical sense, but in many different directions as socio-political forces have gained momentum.

Since the signing of the *Maastricht Treaty* in 1992, there have been a number of European pronouncements which have set out policies and recommendations for the



future direction of language learning in the European Union.

The Commission of the European Communities' adoption of the White Paper *Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society* (1995) is of particular importance since it declares 'proficiency in three European community languages' as a priority objective for every citizen, in order to deal with the 'upheavals' facing a dynamic European society.

Objective IV of the White Paper incorporates elements called for by the European ministers of education on improving and diversifying language teaching and learning within the education systems of the European Union - Britain included! Yet so far this has met with a taciturn ministerial response in Britain.

More recently, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language Teaching and Learning: Language Learning for European Citizenship* (consultation draft by the Council for Cultural Co-operation Education Committee, Strasbourg 1996) is being developed, to provide a common basis and language for describing language learning objectives, methods and assessment in Europe, whilst acknowledging the principle that the

rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed, and that a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication to a source of mutual enrichment and understanding.

(Strasbourg 1996: 1)

This too has so far met with little public reaction from the Department for Education and Employment.

The Maastricht ideals have resulted in extensive European funded initiatives which have language learning at the core. Since its launch in 1995, the Socrates and related programmes have promoted European cooperation at all levels of education. The Comenius Programme within Socrates framework has enabled thousands of pan-European school partnerships and projects to be established. It is rather surprising therefore that the notion of incorporating a European Dimension into our own national curriculum remains enigmatic. Despite the groundswell of innovative work in schools, the absence of a ministerial steer towards implementing the European Dimension has resulted in confusion and 'mixed messages', as wider movements towards an internationalisation of the curriculum, in line with other Member States, become entangled with complex political and cultural issues (Field 1998). Teaching materials packs which have been distributed to schools on two occasions in the past eight years by the Ministry, usually coincide with European landmarks such as Britain's presidency of the European Union. Gestures such as these remain at the level of tokenism rather than a serious attempt at integrating the European Dimension into the curriculum in a coherent and principled way.

### **National Identity and attitudes** ←

{ It is inevitable, therefore that issues surrounding Britain and its relationship with Europe and the wider world have had an effect on national attitudes towards plurilingualism and cultural identity. Whilst national attitudes are clearly reflected in the media, there is also range of statistical data which confirms that the British are often less aware and more apathetic towards Europe than their counterparts elsewhere. A Mintel survey in 1992 (Taylor 1993), showed that only 42% of adults and 53% of 15-19 year olds considered



themselves 'European'. Similarly, a Gallup poll conducted in 1995 revealed that only 43% of the British electorate thought Britain was part of Europe and considered themselves as European (Waller 1995). In comparison with other European countries, the CRMLE survey (Convery et al 1997) suggests a weaker identification with Europe by English young people than by other young Europeans. One can conclude therefore that public opinion is indeed divided and national attitudes are deep-rooted.

Moreover, the notion that the British are poor language learners has earned them a reputation of being incompetent monolinguals in the international context. Whilst it could be argued that the British are victims of their own language, promoting English not only as a national but the world language (an inheritance of British imperialism and an acknowledgement of our close affinity to the United States), the reality of Britain as a linguistic and cultural homogenous society could not be further from the truth. According to the Inner London Education Authority Language Census, 1989 (reported in Reid 1993), one hundred and eighty four languages other than English are used in London schools, the most common being Bengali, Turkish, 'Chinese', Punjabi and Urdu. Some 70,000 children in Inner London alone, reported speaking a language other than English at home. A substantial number of young people in Wales receive their education in Welsh and other examples such as the Gaelic-medium schools demonstrate the polyglot nature of different language communities within the United Kingdom.

And yet, attitudes towards communicating in languages other than English remain steadfast, with the media playing a key role in promulgating our insularity contained within monolingual and monocultural ideals and reinforcing negative images of our



**national linguistic capability:**

**Our off-shore island status gives us an off-shore mentality: separateness and difference are seen as matters to be defensive rather than relaxed about. There seems to be a lack of confidence in our ability to sustain national identity.**

**(Jones 1998: 13)**

**Moreover, the linguistic skills of speakers of languages other than English, especially non-European ones, have either been ignored, marginalised or considered a hindrance to literacy in English (Coyle 1996).**

**Whilst countries such as Finland, have established a national languages policy in line with lifelong learning principles and an internationalisation of national curricula (Marsh, Marsland and Nikula, 1997), there is no high-status embedding of language learning ranging from primary to tertiary sectors and beyond in the UK education system. Ad hoc modern languages provision at primary level and confusing post-16 pathways add to an already disparate system (Giovanazzi 1998).**

### **The National Curriculum**

**The Education Reform Act of 1988 established the principle of central control of the curriculum for the compulsory years of education (ages 5 to 16) for the first time in Britain, setting out subjects to be studied and detailing assessment criteria. Whilst the inclusive 'languages for all' policy increased the amount of compulsory study of modern language learning in secondary schools from three to five years i.e. from the ages of 11 to 16, it did not elevate Modern Languages to the status of core subject, alongside Mathematics, English and Science. In fact, foreign language study remains the only National Curriculum subject which begins at Key Stage 3 (i.e. in the Secondary rather**

than Primary phase).

With hindsight, it could be argued that the Education Reform Act (1988) was a 'missed opportunity' and that the National Curriculum did not go far enough in creating a solid basis for promoting modern languages at all levels and laying the foundation for a comprehensive 'lifelong learning' languages policy. Yet at the time, the underlying tension between wishing to increase the nation's linguistic potential in terms of learning a European language whilst ignoring the role played by the home languages has contributed to the low status of languages. The national focus was clear: raise literacy standards in English. To illustrate this point, the ministry gave the Working Group for National Curriculum English the following brief:

to take account of the ethnic diversity of the school population and society at large, bearing in mind that English should be the first language and medium of instruction for all pupils in England.

(DES/WO 1989)

The implementation of the National Curriculum in the early 1990s took place against a backdrop of dissatisfaction with the state of schooling in England and Wales, as schools and teachers were accused of underachieving and failing their students (Her Majesty's Inspectors -HMI- Reports). Consequently, there followed a major governmental edict to raise educational standards through prescriptive measures, detailed assessment procedures and teacher accountability. This has inevitably had a backwash effect on subsequent teaching methods and the delivery of the curriculum. In addition, changes in the examination system at 16+ (GCSE) and rigorous school inspections by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) have also played their role in setting an agenda which focusses public attention on national measurable outcomes of the education system. This,

it was believed, would result in tangible improvements in student motivation and achievement.

In terms of raising national standards in modern languages, there has been an increasing number of candidates taking the GCSE examination since its introduction in 1990. Even in advance of statutory requirements for the compulsory study of a foreign language between the ages of 11-16, the entry figures at GCSE show an upward trend from 41% in 1989 to 53% in 1996. The number of entrants is recorded as follows:

1990	French GCSE	-	281576 candidates
1994	French GCSE	-	328266 candidates
1997	French GCSE	-	341169 candidates

However, according to Callaghan (1998) the imposed study of modern languages in the 11-16 sector, without a parallel rise in their status, has resulted in neither a shift in attitudes nor an increase in young people wishing to continue studying languages. In fact the number of A- level entries is falling:

1990	French A level	-	27245 candidates
1994	French A level	-	28942 candidates
1998	French A level	-	26488 candidates

Whilst A-level entries in French and German show an increase until 1992, there has been a steady decline since then. This trend has been particularly disappointing in



Scotland, where only 5% of the post-16 students continue to take a modern language at Higher Grade. In England and Wales the percentage is currently around 6.5%. In other words, nine out of ten students do not continue with post-16 modern languages studies after the period of compulsory education. Such evidence serves to underline the ever-widening gap between European resolutions, such as those in the 1995 *White Paper*, and the reality of national trends (statistical source: QCA Research Team, Joint Council for GCSE Report 1998).

### **The Nuffield Inquiry 1998**

From October to December 1998, the most ambitious National Inquiry to date was launched in Britain. Aimed at investigating future national linguistic needs by attracting comments and suggestions from the widest range of 'interested parties', the Inquiry was carried out not only through traditional means, but also through an on-line discussion group and an Internet questionnaire. In the words of the Secretary to the Inquiry:

There has been intermittent pressure for a national policy on languages for many years....in addition central government has in recent years published documents about the provision of languages in connection with policy initiatives, such as those in the area of the school curriculum. However, in a century which has been characterised by explosive growth in the technology and travel, we have had to wait until the last moments before the new millennium to take an overall strategic look at our power as a nation to communicate adequately with speakers of other languages.

(Moys 1998: 4)

To launch the consultation process, the Nuffield Inquiry team commissioned a consultative report entitled *Where are we going with Languages?* (Nuffield 1998) which identified key areas of concern particularly in the light of strategic and policy issues. Thus it seems that at last, serious steps are being taken to move towards identifying

national language needs within an international framework and to drawing ever nearer to a national languages policy.

Paradoxically, two successive governments have promoted the establishment of a national network of specialist state schools with Language College status to promote language education and business links, funded through donations from private enterprise and matched by government pump priming. There are currently over fifty such colleges in England which have been set up as beacons of effective and innovative practice in the field of modern languages, offering a wide range of European and world languages. With modern languages as high status, a focus on technology and the application of language skills to the business world, perhaps these schools, the Language Colleges, will provide a suitable locus for exploring and exploiting alternative future learning contexts?

*[I must point out here that both schools featured in my study, gained Language College Status during the period of research.]*

### **Micro level: the modern languages classroom**

The Graded Test Movement in the 1970s and 1980s heralded a change in emphasis in the way classroom pedagogy was organised. Along with an increasing awareness of the inappropriateness of grammar-based approaches for all learners, came a realisation that oral competence and communication in the language had to play a more prominent role.

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The work of van Ek (Council of Europe 1976) indeed popularised the idea that 'communicative competence' had a Threshold Level i.e. a minimum level at which communication could be operationalised, defined in terms of a range of language



functions (such as asking the way), notions (such as distance or time), topics (such as tourism, eating and drinking), settings (such as 'in the café') and language forms ( je vais + infinitive.)

This gave way to a surge in popularity amongst languages teachers of what became known as the 'communicative approach', where the transmission of the message has pre-eminence over linguistic accuracy. Such an approach was typified by: a shift from language as form (grammar) to language in context and communication; a shift from learner as a passive recipient of language to an active, creative language user (Widdowson 1978); a shift to models of learning which foregrounded the learning process as well as learning outcomes (Kramsch 1984). An accepted view of what constituted good classroom practice was typified by an increase in the use of the target language by teachers and a new 'breed' of text books concentrating on transactional role-plays, gapfilling exercises, short dialogues and authentic tasks, organised through a range of topics regularly re-cycled during the five years leading to GCSE. What then is the legacy of the 'communicative approach' and its accompanying methodologies? Did the changes in classroom practice bring about changes in student performance, achievement and motivation?

Grenfell (1997) describes the widespread 'take-over' of Communicative Language Teaching as having been accepted with 'an apparent general consensus within the profession that this type of language learning is best suited for our pupils...to communicate is now seen as the way and the means to learn language' (op cit: 28). He points out that the National Curriculum is based on these principles which in effect

constitutes a highly theoretical statement of language learning and teaching, yet oddly does not draw directly upon the language of research in an explicit manner or refer to authorities in the field. There is an assumption that 'good' teachers will accept the new orthodoxy as a fair representation of reality. What had started out as an investigation into the kinds of skills needed to develop effective communication, was reduced to a description of what learners might achieve expressed in transactional language in each of the four skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Some ten years ago Mitchell (1988) pointed out that 'communicative competence' goes far beyond survival language, yet acknowledged that it has become known as this. As such, a minimalist interpretation of the communicative approach which focuses only on transactional settings can be said to have reduced classroom practice to the proverbial 'transactional wolf in a communicative sheep's clothing' (Grenfell 1991: 6). It is little wonder that in more recent times the language classroom has received harsh criticism from theorists, rejection or indifference by some learners and a growing dissatisfaction from teachers.

Indeed, Legutke and Thomas (1991) describe how in their studies of language classrooms, the enthusiastic forest of hands together with student willingness to explore new ground, typical of first year learners, is replaced by 'a disquieting progression of lifelessness' as learners become more passive. A state of 'dead bodies and talking heads' is reached after three or four years. 'Instead of being workshops for the cooperative production of learner texts, classrooms often generate output which is simply boring, uninspired and non-committal' (op cit: 8).



They conclude that the language classrooms in their study were typified by a lack of creativity, opportunities for communication and autonomous work - the very features which the communicative approach was hoping to nurture.

It is clear that the transactional approach to language learning has given way to a higher level of oral communication in 'survival' situations. Whilst the A-level Examinations Boards report on declining levels of accuracy and attention to detail by candidates, they do note a much greater freedom and confidence in the use of the language (Northern Examinations and Assessment Board, 1997). However, in Graham's study (1997), A-level students reported that they did not feel that the communicative language syllabus had in fact achieved the aim of promoting communication skills by focussing on 'survival' in the sense of obtaining goods and services. For them, 'language for expressing their thoughts and feelings was considered more in line with their communicative needs,' and yet this was not part of their language learning experience (op cit:22). Salters, Neil and Jarman (1995) criticise further:

The pendulum has swung from a literary syllabus bearing very little resemblance to everyday life to one which is totally utilitarian and transactional in nature, but still manages to be largely irrelevant to pupils in the secondary sector.

(Salters et al *ibid.*: 26)

### **Content matters: National Curriculum versus GCSE**

This raises the issue of the content of language lessons. A syllabus based on survival language runs the risk of being inconsequential and 'pedestrian' (Salters *op cit*), which favours no-one in the long run if the small numbers of students continuing their language

studies at university has significance. In Powell's study (1986), he warned that the pupils found much of the modern language material and its transactional 'tourist situation' context anodyne. This view was taken up more than ten years later by Clark (1998), in her study of the attitudes of 250 students monitored during a period of five years.

Indeed it could be the case that at an age when personal image is important, when pupils are searching for a voice to express themselves, they find much of the subject matter dull, superficial and irrelevant.

(ibid.: 8)

She goes on to use the words of one of her students:

Some of the stuff we've learnt is kind of pointless, because I mean some of the conversations that we have it's not the kind of thing that you'd have in a conversation with a French person.

(ibid.: 8)

Thus the trivial nature of classroom communication has resulted in some cases in the repetition of learners uttering set phrases at a given signal, not dissimilar to Pavlov's dogs! In Donato's words (1996) are we educating for 'communicative incompetence rather than competence'?

Paradoxically, in terms of content or topics as defined by the National Curriculum (1990), these cover general 'Areas of Experience' with almost unlimited potential for exploitation. Moreover, these are not accompanied by prescribed lexis and structures which have to be taught. So why the reductive content taught at classroom level?

Whilst it is clear that the National Curriculum is less focussed on content than on methodological principles, Norman (1998) suggests that it is the influence of the GCSE examinations, which determines classroom practice. It is the examination syllabuses



which are subject to scrutiny by the ministry, thereby assuming the role of methodological intermediary rather than the National Curriculum. This phenomenon is further reinforced by the government's determination to use GCSE examination success as a measure of a national rise in standards. This leads to the status quo:

Fenced in by syllabus demands, often represented by the total dominance of the textbook, learners do not find room to speak for themselves, to use language in communicative encounters, to create text, to stimulate responses or to find solutions to relevant problems.

(Salters et al op cit: 9)

### **Learner attitudes and perceptions**

A small-scale study by Lee et al. (1998) of 65 average ability 'silent majority' year nine teenagers, based in one London borough, the tone is essentially positive. The researchers report that three out of four students interviewed claimed to be as positive about their language learning as they had been three years previously, at the start of their studies. King, in the introduction to the research, states that 'their voices speak out loud and clear' (1998:2) and draws encouragement from the report. However, despite an optimistic gloss, some serious concerns are raised. Modern languages were classed sixth out of a list of seven school subjects. The students reported that the most frequent classroom activities were copying from the board or book, working with a partner, working through a textbook and answering the teacher's questions. Not only do these activities raise some questions about classroom pedagogy, but the learners themselves listed the three least popular activities as copying from the board, reading aloud and vocabulary tests. They also perceived copying from the board or book and drawing and labelling as the least helpful to their learning. This clearly demonstrates a mismatch between activities which the teacher organises to encourage learning, and the way these activities are both

perceived and received by the learners.

Perhaps the more disturbing elements of the study revealed that many of the students had little understanding of what it was they were supposed to be learning. Moreover it was evident that the learners had persistent difficulties with recurring language chunks such as 'je/j'ai' and 'c'est' in French. This led the team to conclude that learning objectives need to be more transparent with built-in progression to take the level of learning beyond that of the word.

Clark's 1998 study, based on a wider cohort is less optimistic:

attitudes continue to be influenced by factors such as relevance of a subject for their future working lives, the comparative difficulty of the subject and the intrinsic interest of the subject matter. On all these counts modern languages prove problematic for many.

(ibid.: 4)

Her study clearly demonstrates through interview data and examination entry statistics, that boys are under-performing in modern languages. She argues that the modern languages curriculum contains inherent gender bias (topics on describing homes, writing to penpals, shopping and pets all tend to play to a female population). To illustrate this point:

A-level entries 1997

subject	males (16-18)	females (16-18)
French	6,859	16,666
Physics	22,386	6,211
English	22,286	55,509

According to Clark, it certainly seems to be the case that the study of a modern language is perceived as being a difficult option and that strategically it is not in the students' best interests to continue with more advanced studies. This claim is backed by evidence from the DfEE Statistical Bulletin (1997) which notes that in the majority of subjects at GCSE, the most common grade awarded was Grade C, whereas in French it was D.

The paradox remains however, that despite having an image of being difficult, modern languages also suffers from not making appropriate cognitive demands on learners especially in the early stages of learning. According to OFSTED reports, the range of opportunities to develop linguistic skills is limited and learners in Key Stage 4 are 'unable to express themselves in the target language in a wider range of contexts than in Key Stage 3' (Boakes in Nuffield Inquiry 1998:38 edited by Moys). Add this to a curriculum which in terms of its content is equivalent to what most learners covered in their mother tongue at Primary level, then the odds seem stacked against success.

If a typical language classroom can be described as:

a largely ego-impoverished and teacher-centred one-way street, in which display questions still dominate, concerns for accuracy by far out-number fluency attempts, and where communication is hard to find

(Legutke and Thomas 1991: 6)

then clearly the rules of the 'language game' will have to change in order to give individual learners the opportunities to develop their linguistic skills and respond to national needs as competent, confident communicators. I personally believe this to be an entitlement.



In Part I of this chapter, I have tried to highlight some of the broad issues which influence and determine the social and pedagogical climate of 'typical' languages classrooms. This is based on visiting many different schools, talking to many different teachers and working alongside trainee teachers. I have nonetheless attempted to represent faithfully certain student perceptions of their language learning - their concerns, their attitudes, both perceived and real. This is not to say that all classrooms and all learners are represented here; neither is the inspirational teaching which I have witnessed on many occasions. Yet what this introduction signifies is a strong personal view that classroom practice in general needs to be redefined, if we are to respond to national needs and come somewhere near to contributing to a plurilingual Europe.

I opened this chapter with a reference to describing contexts where 'language games' are played. In referring the reader back to the *Schindler's List* episode described in the prologue, and by exploring the context where the rules were broken, then a rather different picture begins to emerge. I have decided to include another brief extract from my field notes written on the same occasion as those in Extract 2.



## Extract three: Researcher Field Diary

### Preliminary visit - History lesson

(Contd. from Extract 2)

After my initial surprise, we (DC and AR) continued with a short discussion before the teacher announced a change of activity. I began to scribble the following questions:

- Why was this individual able to communicate so well?
- Was he a particularly 'gifted' linguist? Had he a French parent?
- Where had he acquired his confidence and strategic competence? Was it to do with individual differences?
- What was special about this environment? AR is in the school's bilingual section which means he studies geography and history through the medium of French. Was his linguistic competence due essentially to increased exposure to the language?

#### Note:

I later discovered that AR is by no means one of the best linguists in the class. There are no special circumstances which might significantly differentiate his 'performance' from other members of the group. He has not had any additional exposure to French or to French-speakers than his peers. In fact, he has a reputation in the school as being something of a 'plodder'. He bore an 'average' label! And yet highly developed strategic and linguistic skills had been spontaneously displayed. This information added to my curiosity. The question *why* had to be answered somehow. The next step seemed to suggest an investigation into the potential of the bilingual classes.....

## **Part 2: Bilingual Education - alternative contexts?**

*Whilst accepting that being in the bilingual section was a contributory factor to AR's linguistic competence, I needed to satisfy myself that there was much more at play than increased exposure to the target language. I needed to explore the bilingual education phenomenon as a potential environment for playing different kinds of games. Part 2 of this chapter documents that search.*

### **Defining bilingual education**

The literature on bilingual education is as extensive as the number of its different interpretations, permutations and models. In recent years, there have been wide-ranging experiments around the world with intensive forms of second and foreign language learning (Klapper 1996). From the United States (Snow 1992, Bernhardt 1992) to Australia (Clyne 1991, de Courcy 1993), bilingual and bicultural programmes flourish and Canadian immersion education has gained a world-wide reputation (Cummins and Swain 1986, Genesee 1987). Across Europe, many countries have witnessed an upsurge in interest in bilingual education as a means of helping learners to achieve a higher level of competence in a foreign or alternative language. For example, Spanish-speaking pupils on Catalan immersion courses have been shown to achieve fluency in Catalan without impairing their Spanish (Artigal 1991). Similarly in Wales, immersion-type education in Welsh medium schools has proved just as successful (Dodson 1978, Baker 1993). The latter two examples however can be contrasted with bilingual education in France and Germany which arose as a consequence of the 1963 *Franco-German Co-operation*

*Agreement*, in which the promotion of the partner language in both Germany and France was agreed (Christ 1996: 83). Clearly one must draw a distinction between bilingual education which uses 'minority' or 'heritage' languages as the medium for instruction and other instances where the learner's mother tongue is the dominant language but instruction is through an alternative language. A further distinction can be drawn in contexts where the learner's mother tongue is used for immigrant or migrant groups or where the dominant language is used as the language for instruction for immigrant children - often referred to as 'submersion' (Baetens-Bearsdmore 1993).

Thus the use of 'bilingual education' as an umbrella term which refers to different modes of using non-native languages for instruction (Baker *ibid.*) is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it is easily associated with bilingualism, and those children who are brought up in bilingual homes. Secondly, the term is already well-established in the context of teaching linguistic minority groups (Marsh, Marsland and Nikula, 1997). Thirdly, it does not explicitly describe the relationship of the language used for instruction to either the majority language spoken within specific communities or the disciplines with which it is associated in the educational context.

Furthermore, there is a plethora of related terminology which incorporates differences in focus: 'content-based second language instruction' (Brinton, Snow and Wesche 1989) places a greater emphasis on language learning; 'language enhanced or enriched content instruction' emphasises content learning; 'mainstream bilingual education' refers to bilingual education aimed at majority children, where they also receive formal teaching of the language in question (Baker *ibid.*, Marsh and Nikula 1996); 'immersion' education



has as a basic principle at least 50% of instruction conducted through a non-native language (Swain and Lapkin 1982); content and language integrated learning (Snow, Met and Genesee 1989) emphasises the integration of both elements and elevates neither to a superior position.

For the purposes of this thesis however, I shall restrict my definition of the term 'bilingual education' to the use of a modern language as the language of instruction in a subject other than language teaching itself. More specifically, I shall focus on schools in England where subjects such as geography or history are taught through the medium of French, German or Spanish, in what is often referred to as a 'bilingual section'.

### **Bilingual sections in English schools**

In order to situate the kind of learning environment shared by AR and other learners in bilingual sections, it is useful to briefly map the development of bilingual sections in England.

Discounting the 'International' and 'European' schools whose brief is different from that of mainstream schools, there is but a handful of state schools which have a bilingual section. The exact number is unknown, but likely to be in the region of about five or six schools (Hawkins 1996). Whilst some very successful pilot school bilingual sections were operating in the 1970s (Coyle 1994), and there are some excellent examples of bilingual education in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, a national tradition of developing multilingual educational projects does not exist. Bilingual sections therefore, have survived in isolated pockets, occasionally supported by foreign embassies but inevitably

staffed by enthusiastic and innovative teachers. The reasons for the small number of operational bilingual sections is easily accounted for given our national context, and is related essentially to the first part of this chapter. These are listed as follows:

- Linguistic competence in a foreign language whilst perceived as a national need is not an educational priority - therefore financial and policy support are absent.
- Britain's inheritance of the anglophone tradition and the desire to suppress the heritage and ex-commonwealth 'minority' languages weigh heavily upon radical reform.
- An unsympathetic national examination system refuses to recognise subject competence in a language other than English (except of course in modern foreign languages).
- There is a perceived absence of lobbying from subject teachers, other than a small group of linguists and other educationalists, to raise the awareness of the potential gains of teaching subjects through the medium of a foreign language.
- A lack of suitably qualified teachers who have competence in both the subject and a language.
- Policy is becoming increasingly prescriptive, centralised and evidence-based, with teachers unlikely to take risks with innovative curriculum projects whilst

under extreme pressure for students to gain grades A-C at GCSE (Coyle 1999).

- Crucial issues concerning bilingual education such as teacher supply, student entitlement, resources, funding and certification have yet to be resolved.

### **The expansion of bilingual sections**

Despite the small number of schools who have invested heavily in developing the teaching and learning of subjects through the medium of French, German or Spanish, there have been some very encouraging recent developments.

The government's Language College initiative has in its *Guidance for Schools* (DfEE) the following:

37. Some schools may wish to focus on offering a broader range of modern foreign language subjects [...] incorporate [...] the teaching of particular subjects through the medium of another foreign language, at least for specific pupil groups, or through opportunities for pupils to practice and experience modern foreign languages outside formal language lessons.

38. Some may wish to go further in adopting a bilingual approach- specialising in the use of a particular modern foreign language throughout the school and across the curriculum (f.s.).

(ibid.: 1995)

As the Language Colleges expand, they have become more confident in delivering a diversified language curriculum, which has given way to a groundswell of interest in bilingual sections. As long as schools remain in competition with each other, this interest may have strategic as well as pedagogical overtones. Additionally, as more schools become involved with educational movements such as 'School Improvement' and 'Raising Achievement' it may well be that bilingual education finds a place in



contributing towards improving foreign language results in public examinations.

At the European level, bilingual education in many different forms is flourishing (*Council of Europe Reports 12A and 12B*, 1993-1996). With increased links through European funded programmes, research projects and pan-European policies then perhaps bilingual or plurilingual initiatives are now set to have an influence on teacher thinking in Britain.

### **Research evidence**

The indications so far suggest that AR's learning experiences in a school with a bilingual section are likely to be conducive to developing a high level of linguistic competence, given the exposure time to the language and the bilingual 'ethos' i.e. the teachers are likely to be strongly committed to the success of the pedagogical outcomes as reflected in the *Hawthorne effect* (Cohen and Manion 1994: 202). However, it is to research evidence that I wish to turn in order to discover more about the classroom context of bilingual 'language games' - the process, the micro-climate, the strategies and the pedagogical moves of the game, not simply the results!

There is no systematic evidence which clearly sets out the advantages and problems relating to teaching subjects through another language in the UK. National statistics are of course one source of data. These demonstrate that GCSE candidates who have experience of learning subjects through the medium of a foreign language, do extremely well in their language examinations (Coyle 1996:163). Some students take the language examination at least one year early. Moreover, examination results in the subject (such

as geography) suggest that the students do as well as their peers who have studied the subject in English. However, the results tell us nothing about the pedagogical value of the students' learning experiences or individual strengths and weaknesses, nor do they shed light on the relationship between length of exposure to the language and linguistic competence.

The Ashfield pilot study (Coyle 1994) indicates that there are benefits other than linguistic ones to be gained. The report claims that for the class of 13 year olds who spent one term studying Science through French, there was a significant improvement in the pupils' willingness to concentrate, to read more demanding texts and to operationalise learner strategies. Yet this small-scale study was based in one school with one class of learners over a very limited period of time. It is therefore not possible to draw generalisable conclusions.

### **Canadian Immersion Programmes**

I shall turn briefly therefore to the literature on Canadian Immersion, since few learning programmes can have been subjected to such intensive research and evaluation since their inception in the 1960s, leading up to and after the Official Languages Act 1969, (Day and Shapson 1996). There are many different varieties of immersion programmes - those which are determined by age on entry namely *early*, *late*, *deferred*; and those which are determined by the amount of second language used i.e. *partial* or *total*. The most frequent models are *early total* and *late partial*. It is of course the latter model which is most relevant to explore since this corresponds most closely to the bilingual sections in England, which tend to begin in the third year of secondary education. (I should point out



that there is no commonly accepted model currently in use in England) .

It could be argued that Canadian immersion programmes bear little resemblance to bilingual sections in five or six English comprehensive schools. Nonetheless, there may be a danger in dismissing some of the findings as irrelevant, when in fact they may usefully shed light on classroom practice in a different yet related environment. It is clear that there is no definitive theory upon which to base our bilingual pedagogy. As Baetens Beardsmore observes:

The social situation in each country in general and decisions in educational policy in particular always have an effect, so there is no single blueprint of content and language integration that could be applied in the same way in different countries - no model however successful is for export.

(Baetens Beardsmore 1993:39)

For the purposes of exploring the context of this study, I shall draw the reader's attention to key findings in Canadian research which are significant to the thesis. Immersion education in Canada has proved to be so popular that over 12% of all pupils learning a foreign language in Canada do so through immersion programmes (Klapper 1996). Initial research confirmed the success of the programmes, by highlighting for example that the learners' receptive language skills (listening and reading) develop to near-native or native standards (Cummins and Swain 1986). However, subsequent research has revealed some serious deficiencies. These are listed as follows:

- The accuracy and grammatical competence of learners' productive skills (speaking and writing) have been brought into question (Hammerly 1989:123).

Immersion programmes have been criticised as producing speakers of 'Frenghish'



(Pellerin and Hammerly 1986).

- Immersion programmes have shown that Krashen's (1982) notion of 'comprehensible input' by the teachers is a necessary but not sufficient condition for second language acquisition.

Krashen's claim that second language learners 'go for meaning' is not the whole picture: in order to acquire a second language through comprehensible input, learners need to be engaged in some sort of form-function analysis.

(Klapper 1996: 62)

Swain (1987:325) made a strong case for encouraging 'comprehensive output' by learners in order to focus their attention on form as well as meaning.

- It is now accepted that varying degrees of formal language teaching must be incorporated into immersion programmes (Bibeau 1991, Hammerly 1987) in order to avoid 'fossilised interlanguage' (Lyster 1987). This led to a call for a linguistic syllabus to be included in immersion teaching in order to combine communication aspects with a systematic, graded language component. Implementation is now in progress (Day and Shapson 1996).
- A more recent emphasis on the process rather than the outcomes of immersion programmes has led to classroom observational studies which give insight into common practice and classroom pedagogy (Laplante 1993, Weber 1991, Swain and Carroll 1987). These raised grave concerns:

- Snow's (1990) study confirmed that in contrast with abundant teacher input, learner input was minimal.
- Mohan states: 'content classrooms present a high proportion of teacher talk, and the opportunities for student response are limited and tightly controlled' (Mohan 1986:13).
- Swain and Lapkins' (1986) research, based in nineteen immersion classes reports that 81% of all learner utterances were no more than one word, phrase or clause in length.

This research therefore highlights two key areas for concern: learner output and accuracy in productive skills. Perhaps more fundamentally:

Canadian experiences and the attendant research show that content teaching does not necessarily mean good language teaching; content must be manipulated pedagogically if its potential for language learning is to be realised  
(Klapper 1996: 70)

For me, Canadian research emphasises that it is not the immersion programme or the bilingual section per se which enables individual learners such as AR to become competent, confident linguists, but rather the **quality** of the learning environment and the experiences of individual learners - whatever the context. This makes a significant contribution to determining the direction of this thesis. In other words, in order to discover more about the 'language game' played in AR's school, I would need to become part of that environment over a period of time, in order to understand the significant elements and contributory factors which would enable the specific rules to be identified and defined. This may lead to subsequent suggestions for changes in the way 'games' might be played in other settings.

## Summary

By way of introduction to the thesis, the first chapter has painted a picture of the current contexts in which the teaching and learning of modern languages in Britain takes place. The macro view contrasts European initiatives such as the *White Paper* recommendations and the *Common Framework* with the national scene where in the absence of a national policy, the European Dimension and plurilingual education struggle to find a place. The National Curriculum for modern languages does not commence until Key Stage 3 and yet there is an outcry from the business and industry world that our national language needs are not being met. Clearly, the promotion of modern language learning is not a government priority at the present time.

At the micro level, the enthusiastic curriculum development of the 1980s has been replaced by a different ethos involving the implementation of a statutory National Curriculum and the dominance of standards and GCSE results. This had the effect of curtailing the development of methodologies associated with the communicative approach. A prescriptive topic-based syllabus is ill-placed to motivate young people to communicate in a language other than English, create a more positive learning environment for language learning and allow adolescents to find a 'voice'.

In order to understand better the learning environments of students such as AR and to prepare for a research focus on those specific contexts, issues concerning bilingual education were addressed. There are very few schools in Britain where bilingual education operates in the sense of the teaching and learning of subjects through the medium of French, German or Spanish, and a paucity of relevant research. However, a



brief overview of Canadian Immersion research was given in order to extrapolate key findings which may also have relevance to the British context. It is clear from this research that whilst there are many gains, the immersion programme also raises some pertinent pedagogical issues. It is not a panacea, neither must it be assumed that learning subjects through the medium of a foreign language automatically leads to high levels of strategic and linguistic competence.

I should like to conclude this chapter by articulating for the reader the driving force, the catalyst, the pedagogical curiosity for subsequent investigation and research.

I wanted to explore further the learning environment shared by AR and the rest of his class in order to:

- develop a deeper understanding of potentially effective learning environments where modern languages are used
- discover conditions where soliciting and structuring pedagogical moves were regularly used by learners - both with each other and with the teacher
- investigate the nature of the pedagogical moves which encouraged the development of strategic and linguistic competence.
- explore similar learning environments to identify features of commonality and thereby consider the generalisability and transferability of those features to other

environments.

At this stage, these points do not constitute hypotheses in the traditional sense. Instead, they are the guiding questions which will serve initially to steer the researcher towards a more focussed conceptual framework for the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **DEFINING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

*For me the acquisition of a new language will remain a phenomenon of natural fascination and mystery, not simply because it is a special skill of such incredible complexity that it remains one of the greatest achievements of the human mind, but because it is also testimony of how much we can accomplish within the limitations that nature has placed upon us.*

(Scovel 1988: 186)

### **Part 1: Deconstructing learning - finding a path through**

#### **Introduction**

Some years ago, during a post-to-post exchange with a teacher in Alsace, France, I decided that as a non-German speaker this would be an ideal opportunity to learn the language. Living on the border between France and Germany provided me with sympathetic learning conditions, especially in terms of the germanophone media. For a whole year I frequently listened to German radio. My understanding of German at the end of the year was marginally but not significantly better than at the start. I had persevered partly because I thought it was 'doing me good' and partly because I enjoyed the selection of music played. Some years later, when learning German at an evening class, the teacher was astonished at my accent and intonation. She found it hard to believe that I was not a fluent speaker of German. From this experience I draw the following conclusions:

- Without the conscious intervention of the learning process, I was not able to



acquire German, in spite of the fact that I was surrounded by and at times 'immersed' in the language. I had not been sufficiently focussed on the 'aural' wallpaper for comprehension and learning to take place.

- Without necessarily understanding the meaning of the language, I had listened repeatedly to the intonation patterns and the accents of the speakers so that I was able to imitate this subsequently.
- I found myself repeating German sounds to myself. Albeit that I did not always understand the meaning, I was 'playing' with the language.
- I needed to interact and use the language - the radio was not enough.
- 'Learning' is essential if second or foreign language is to develop.

I have opened the first part of this chapter with a personal anecdote since the experience made me reflect deeply about the nature and role of 'learning' within a language acquisition context. In particular, it steered me towards exploring guiding principles where learners as well as teachers have a greater role to play in constructing a meaningful and effective learning context. For me this is the next stage in articulating the conceptual framework of my research study. In Part I of this chapter, I should like to document this exploration by finding a path through some of the established theories of learning and second language learning, in an attempt to construct a conceptual basis which will provide an alternative to traditional game playing.

## **Theories of Learning, Language and Second Language Learning**

As classroom researchers we have particular disciplinary roots, philosophical commitments, and methodological strengths that lead us to acceptance or endorsement of particular paradigms. In turn, these paradigms organise and shape our view of classrooms and classroom phenomena. They guide our thinking about questions we might ask and suggest where we might look for answers.

(Anderson and Burns 1989: 40)

According to Anderson et al (1989) the primary purpose of classroom research is to help educators improve both the conditions and quality of learning. In order to do this, four conditions are required:

- an articulation of the conceptual framework i.e. making one's values explicit
- a clear statement of purpose
- defensible planning
- careful interpretation of results

Whilst these conditions are not contentious, neither are they straightforward. The definition of the conceptual framework i.e. defining the chosen paradigm is arguably the most challenging and crucial - especially in the field of foreign language learning and teaching where the interrelationship between theories of teaching, learning language and foreign language learning are complex, interdependent and open to wide interpretation.

To attempt to define the precise nature of the role of learning within the development of a second or foreign language would require definitions not only of constructs such as teaching, instruction, learning and acquisition, but also a clear understanding of their interrelationship. In turn, the way in which we perceive these processes depends upon the conceptual framework of a particular study, since all theories of learning are based

on fundamental assumptions which may or may not differ radically one from another depending on their genesis, associated disciplines and conceptual frameworks. Macaro (1997) draws particular attention to the inherent tension between theories of language and theories of language learning, the latter tending to position themselves along a continuum polarised between behaviourist and cognitive interpretations.

Furthermore, there are fundamental differences between theories of language as mother tongue, theories of language as second or foreign language and theories as to how language may be acquired or learned. Theories to describe language i.e. the 'what' - are not the same as theories which account for language learning i.e. the 'how'. In addition, individual learners bring with them their own set of 'pre-programmed' variables such as context, process and presage variables (Dunkin and Biddle 1974:3) all of which have some influence on the very complex processes involved in learning.

My main concern in this chapter is not to indulge in an overview of theories, but to focus on those issues which contribute to the quest for a theoretical base, a view of learning processes which will enable me to re-examine the constituents of effective learning and to link teaching with learning in a more interdependent and interactive way.

### **Acquisition or learning?**

A useful starting point might be to differentiate between first and second language learning or acquisition, although the two are often used interchangeably. Second language acquisition according to Ellis (1985), is the 'sub-conscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural way



or a tutored setting' (op cit: 2). Ellis warns that second language acquisition theory (SLA) is a 'complex process involving many interrelated factors [...] SLA is not a uniform and predictable phenomenon' (ibid). Moreover, the focus in SLA research until more recently has tended to be on the learning of linguistic knowledge rather than how learners learn to use the language.

Acquisition is the term generally used to describe the process of 'picking up' a second language through exposure, whereas learning is to do with the conscious study of a second language. Whilst there is a generally accepted view that they describe different processes, there is no consensus as to nature of those processes. Arguably the most contentious theorising in recent times, has centred on a clear distinction between the two proposed by Krashen (1989). Whilst I do not wish to rehearse the arguments surrounding the controversial distinction, Krashen's work serves to illustrate the point that constructs such as learning or acquisition are 'slippery'. For Krashen, both processes have a role to play in 'knowing' a second language, yet they represent two independent means of gaining that ability. Acquisition is 'a subconscious process that is identical to the process used in first language acquisition in all important ways', whereas 'learning is conscious knowledge, or knowing about language. In everyday language when we talk about 'grammar' or 'rules' we are referring to learning not acquisition' (op cit: 8). In other words, speaking in another language for example is the result of acquisition, not its cause.

Moreover, Krashen maintained a 'non-interface' position between acquisition and learning, claiming that the two do not merge, but that the role of learning is essentially

to act as a 'monitor' to improve language - in terms of formal correctness. Thus, according to Krashen, an individual's capacity to use a second language comes mostly from what has been acquired and not what has been learned. In fact, he goes as far as to say that language classes are effective for beginners to gain access to the 'outside world' but much less effective for intermediate learners. This claim does not fit easily with the vast number of fluent foreign language speakers who have never even visited the target countries. I am thinking in particular here about some of the Soviet linguists, speakers of English, who simply never left the former USSR, and of course school students such as AR who could not be classed as a beginner and is certainly not immersed in French at home!

The role of learning then as a conscious deliberate process has had a precarious relationship with language development in general and with the learning of a second or foreign language in particular. Moreover, contrary to popular opinion, the interplay between theory and practice has both pragmatic and long-lasting consequences - different theoretical models, often based on first language acquisition studies, have led to some commonly accepted beliefs about the way languages are learned. In turn, these beliefs play a powerful role in determining how languages are taught. Traditionally, therefore, the role of learning in language development has been defined according to a set of guiding principles which focus on teaching. These can be said to polarise between a view of language development as innate, and one which concentrates on an overt articulation of grammatical or linguistic components.

For example in the 1970s, teaching focussed on audio-lingual methods of foreign



language instruction, based on behaviourist stimulus-response theories, which in turn favoured the development of linguistic conditioned responses (Skinner 1957). In this instance, learning a language it was believed, involved habit formation and imitation or automaticity of responses to cues, rather than underlying cognitive processing. For some, learning a second language concerns the learning of grammatical and linguistic properties, for others comparing first and second languages held the answers according to the principles of Contrastive Analysis (Lado 1964, Dulay and Burt 1975). Van Lier (1988: 77) cites three categories of second language acquisition theories: those with an interactive focus (e.g. Discourse Model, Hatch 1978, Variable Competence Model, Ellis 1985); those with a linguistic focus (e.g. Strategy Competence Model, Bialystok 1978; Universal Hypothesis, Wode 1980) and those with a social process focus (e.g. Social Psychological Model, Lambert 1963; Intergroup Model, Giles and Burn 1982). In addition, the influence of first language acquisition research such as the Chomskian school, gave priority to the notion of Universal Grammar and the unfolding of innate properties in the learner. Chomsky advocated that all languages share a general set of principles and that language inherent in the human mind constitutes a universal grammar. According to this view, conscious learning is minimal but uncovering grammar systems essential (Chomsky 1954, Cook 1985).

Ellis (1985) points out that there has been no shortage in theorising about second language acquisition to the point of 'superfluity'. He argues however for both theory-then-research as well as research-then-theory approaches since this reflects the recognition that the field of SLA requires different research perspectives. Whilst Ellis identifies seven theories for describing SLA (the Acculturation Model, Accommodation



Theory, Discourse Theory, the Monitor Model, the Variable Competence Model, the Universal Hypothesis and Neurofunctional Theory - see chapter 10 in *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, 1985) he accounts for the abundance of theories by referring to the paradigm shift brought about in linguistics and related fields by Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (already referred to in the previous paragraph), which challenged prevailing theory at that time.

Littlewood (1984) follows a more 'inclusive' line of thought, in concocting a continuum which accommodates different models for second language learning. At one end there is the Creative Construction model and at the other the Skills-Learning model. The former emphasises cognitive processing, which involves the learner in constructing a series of internal representations of the second language system through processing strategies and exposure to language in communicative situations. This model lies in direct contrast to theories which advocate habit formation and learned behaviours. The Skills-Learning models foregrounds drills and practice on the assumption that these productive activities lead to an internalisation of the system underlying the language. In both models, the outcome is the same, i.e. that learners will possess a set of cognitive structures through which they can create new utterances. It is the route which is different, the means to the end. This can be represented as follows:

### **Creative Construction Model**

input from exposure → internal processing → system constructed by learners →

spontaneous utterances

### **Skill-Learning Model**

input from instruction → productive activity → system assimilated by learners →

spontaneous utterances

Littlewood (op cit) proposed that by including two contrasting models into one schema, this could give way to a more general social learning theory, where elements of both models come into play depending on the variables within the learning context. Whilst I applaud the value in constructing a more general social learning theory, I have two major concerns with this representation. Firstly, from my experiences of observing foreign language classroom practice over an extended period of time, I am not convinced that the skill learning model leads easily to spontaneous utterances. Secondly, in my view, processes involved in learning, such as interaction, are as important as the outcomes. The schema does not foreground interaction, which I presume to be subsumed into 'systems leading to spontaneous utterances' represented in the above diagram. Moreover, I would assert that interaction is neither linear nor totally dependent on input by the teacher or exposure, as the models suggest.

Whilst I concur with Littlewood when he says that:

Development does not only occur when people make conscious efforts to learn. Progress also occurs as a result of spontaneous sub-conscious mechanisms which are activated when learners are involved in communication with the second language.

(ibid.: 90)

It is surely the interpretation of 'communication' and its role within the learning process, which holds the key.

Adopting a more controversial stance, Firth and Wagner (1997) argue for a reconceptualisation of SLA research which would redress the balance between cognitive



and social or contextual orientations to language.

We contend that SLA research requires a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use, an increased 'emic' (i.e. participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts and the broadening of the traditional SLA data base.

(ibid.: 285)

Reflecting upon these differing views, one is tempted to draw an 'eclectic' conclusion, by estimating that in all probability, different aspects drawn from different theories may all have a role to play - to a lesser or greater extent. Yet I would argue that eclecticism in this case provides a convenient but unsatisfactory solution.

What is clear, if I return to my Alsacian experiences, is that exposure per se does not constitute 'a conscious effort to learn', neither is it a sufficient condition and that 'anyone who says that all or most language learning occurs unconsciously must have a very special definition of consciousness in mind' (van Lier 1996: 42).

Widdowson aptly summarises the position so far:

It would seem that students need something in the way of formal instruction as well as acquisition by natural engagement. It is not just that one supplements the other: effective learning would appear to be a function of the *relationship* between formal instruction and natural use.

(Widdowson 1990:15)

Following on from Widdowson's equipollent position, I should like to consider the interplay between teaching ('formal instruction') and learner use of the language ('natural engagement'). Effective use of a language is not only to do with 'knowing' the linguistic system or to use Cook's (1985) terms 'the processes in which the second



language unfolds,' but also with using that knowledge to communicate or the processes governing the growth of 'channel capacity'. In this sense therefore, learning can be said to centre on the interrelationship between input and output. To illustrate this point, Anderson (1983) uses the terms 'declarative' and 'procedural' knowledge to describe the 'that' of acquisition of language systems, which a learner needs in order to become proficient in the language, and the 'how' of using that knowledge for effective communication. According to Anderson, procedural knowledge involves the automatising of declarative knowledge.

However, I should like to re-conceptualise the relationship between the 'what' and the 'how', by positioning it within a dynamic context, recently characterised by a change in focus from teaching to learning. By plotting how this shift in emphasis can potentially and fundamentally provide alternative ways of exploring the intricate balance of interconnected processes, then this foregrounds the 'how' rather than the 'that'; the intake and output (to use the container metaphor terms) rather than the input; the control rather than the knowledge; the nature of the social negotiation and interaction which facilitates the learning rather than the drilling and practice of formal structures; and ultimately the learner and his or her pedagogical moves rather than the teacher.

### **From teaching to learning: a shift in emphasis - a changing paradigm**

Gage (1963) asserts that teaching is to do with changing the ways in which others can or will behave. Klauer, on the other hand (in Anderson 1989), prefers to emphasise the interpersonal nature of teaching between a teacher and students, but warns against inferring a cause-effect relationship, i.e. teaching does not 'cause' learning. Brown

(1987) however, maintains that teaching cannot be defined apart from learning since teaching is about guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learner to learn and setting the conditions for learning. Whilst I uphold Brown's view that teaching is inextricably linked with learning, I believe that one can and must focus on either one, whilst acknowledging that neither exists in isolation.

The recent and significant shift away from a focus on teaching to learning has brought with it a move away from a restrictive notion of pedagogy (i.e. focus on teaching) towards the principles of what Knowles (1984) terms androgogy (i.e. the art and science of helping others to learn). Here learners are encouraged to participate in the process of self-awareness in terms of how they think, learn and problem solve. Such a shift defines education as a joint activity in which teachers and learners work interdependently to achieve personal and collective goals. Equal emphasis is placed on the content and the process of learning. In addition, joint activity assumes interaction and it is the interactive process which frequently foregrounds classroom talk (Amidon and Hunter 1967, in Anderson et al, op cit). Whilst Klauer (op cit) describes interaction as bi-directional, I would argue that in order to achieve the full potential of 'language games', it must be multi-directional, where interaction not only involves teachers and learners, but also learners with learners.

This extends Bloom's view that

it is the teaching not the teacher that is the key to the learning of the students i.e. it is not what teachers are like but what they do in interacting with their students that determines what students learn and how they feel about the learning and about themselves

(Bloom 1972: 339)



and emphasises student interaction as an essential ingredient of the learning process. This is summed up in Joyce et al, when they state at the beginning of their book *Models of learning - tools for teaching*:

our (teachers') tool box is the models of teaching - actually models for learning - that simultaneously define the nature of the content, the learning strategies and the arrangements for social interaction that create the learning environment of our students.

(Joyce et al 1997: 7)

Introducing an androgical perspective therefore into the equation, foregrounds the crucial nature of interaction between the social environment (the classroom) and student learning (in terms of their strategic and linguistic competence) and directs the focus of this study towards learning rather than teaching. At this point, I refer the reader back to the summary in Chapter 1.

A focus on learning, however, is still too broad, since classrooms are complex in terms of their multi-dimensionality, simultaneity and unpredictability, especially concerning teacher and student behaviours. Anderson points out that one of the great issues of classroom research is the difficulty that researchers have in describing and understanding the phenomena of student learning. He believes that a neglect of learning stems from the inability of learning theory to generate classroom theory. The question which remains of course is to how one identifies those observable behaviours which enable the researcher to explore learning processes more meaningfully and thereby construct theories of 'classroom learning' (Doyle 1997).



Ashman and Conway (1997) believe that an acceptance of the principles of androgogy will inevitably and ultimately require a paradigm shift:

<b>Paradigmatic Assumptions</b>	<b>Alternative Paradigmatic Principles</b>
1 Emphasis is on content, and acquiring a body of knowledge, once and for all.	→Emphasis is on learning how to learn
2 Learning as a product, a destination	→Learning as a process, a journey
3 Learning processes have a relatively rigid structure, and there is a prescribed curriculum	→Learning processes have flexible structures, varied starting points, mixed learning experiences. Student "ownership" of learning goals (Magnusson & Palinscar, 1995)
4 Teacher is the instructor and imparter of knowledge	→The teachers is a learning agent too, one who learns from the students
5 There is a priority as performance	→A priority is given to self-concept as a key determinant of successful learning
6 Emphasis is on the external world	→Use of student inner experiences provide contexts for learning
7 Learning is age related	→Learning is not age specific and there is an integration of age groupings as education is seen as a lifelong process

(adapted from Whitaker, 1995: 15 my re-ordering)

Montgomery (1994) noted important consequences of this shift from teaching to learning on the organisation of the learning environment, particularly in terms of the input of information, processes adopted and the outcomes of learning. In other words, game playing in this context is likely to involve an alternative set of rules.

### **From transmission to ecology: contrasting models - alternative metaphors**

It is within a context, which is sympathetic to androgogical principles, that I should like

to consider some current assumptions about second language learning. More and more researchers are focussing attention on the learner whilst investigating: the role of conscious awareness in the acquisition process; how learners come to understand a second language linguistic system; and how learners learn to control themselves and the learning situation.

Until recently, the 'accepted' and prevalent view of an input-output processing model of learning has had tangible effects on teaching in many classrooms. Oddly enough, the conduit model of language has its origins in an engineering model for describing machine communication and information processing. Moreover, despite the fact that many discredited Krashen's theories as being unsubstantiated (Larsen-Freeman 1983, Chaudron 1983, Gregg 1984, Swain 1985, McLaughlin 1987 ), it is probably Krashen, more than anyone else, who popularised the Input Hypothesis for teachers. This *Fundamental Pedagogical Principle* claims that acquiring a second language is dependent on comprehensible input - certainly not the case with my German radio! Definitions of 'comprehensible input' are of course varied - for example the behaviourist view involving responses to stimuli; a nativist stance, where learner output is explained in terms of the characteristics of teacher input; or, more recently, an interactionist position, which focuses on the discourse between learners and 'caretakers'. Opponents of Krashen, however, quite reasonably argue that 'comprehensible input' does not take account of the learner's comprehensible output.

The role of input in learning has been 'chewed over' many times. It is clear that the successful learning of a foreign language requires much more than input (Ellis 1980,



Long 1981, Swain 1985), since the learner needs to intake and provide comprehensible output before communication can be said to have taken place. However, I would hold that even this counter argument is simplistic. It seems to me that the complex learning process can not easily be accounted for by an input-output system. It does not take into account the socio-cultural or affective elements of human communication. In its crudest sense, I see it as the *foie gras* approach, where teachers 'force feed' learners until they are ready to be 'killed off.' Despite the fact that the input-output model is seriously questioned by communication theorists, Platt and Brooks (1994) describe it as an idea that 'dies hard'. Misunderstandings of this phenomenon have been perpetuated in the communication field by presenting what happens between speakers, for example, as a negotiated exchange of message meaning. It is clear that communication does not consist of learners simply sending messages back and forth. If one accepts that prior knowledge and learner experiences play a profoundly important role in comprehension, then it follows that the communication process is more complex. As I commented earlier, it is indeed the conceptualisation of communication, which holds the key.

Platt and Brooks (1994:508) usefully point out that theories of second language acquisition may be influenced by but remain conceptually different from theories of communication and talk. Interactionists such as Long, (1985), Pica, Young and Doughty (1987), and Pica, (1994) argue that the transmission process itself can in fact be facilitated through 'negotiation' and a focus on 'dialogical' rather than 'monological' interchange. It is in this context that talk and interaction between learners and learners, and learners and teachers is emphasised. The Interactionist approach particularly focusses on interaction involving two-way communication as an ideal way to negotiate



meaning and ultimately to acquire the target language. This supports Firth and Wagner's call for a more 'holistic' approach to and outlook on language and language acquisition, which foregrounds the 'dynamics as well as the summation of language acquisition, that is more emically and interactionally attuned ( Firth and Wagner 1997: 296).

Frawley and Lantolf take a more extreme stance since they maintain that individuals use speech to **process their experience** not simply to report it. This offers an additional dimension to the model and implies a deeper relationship between language and learning by promoting the social context as the locus for that learning:

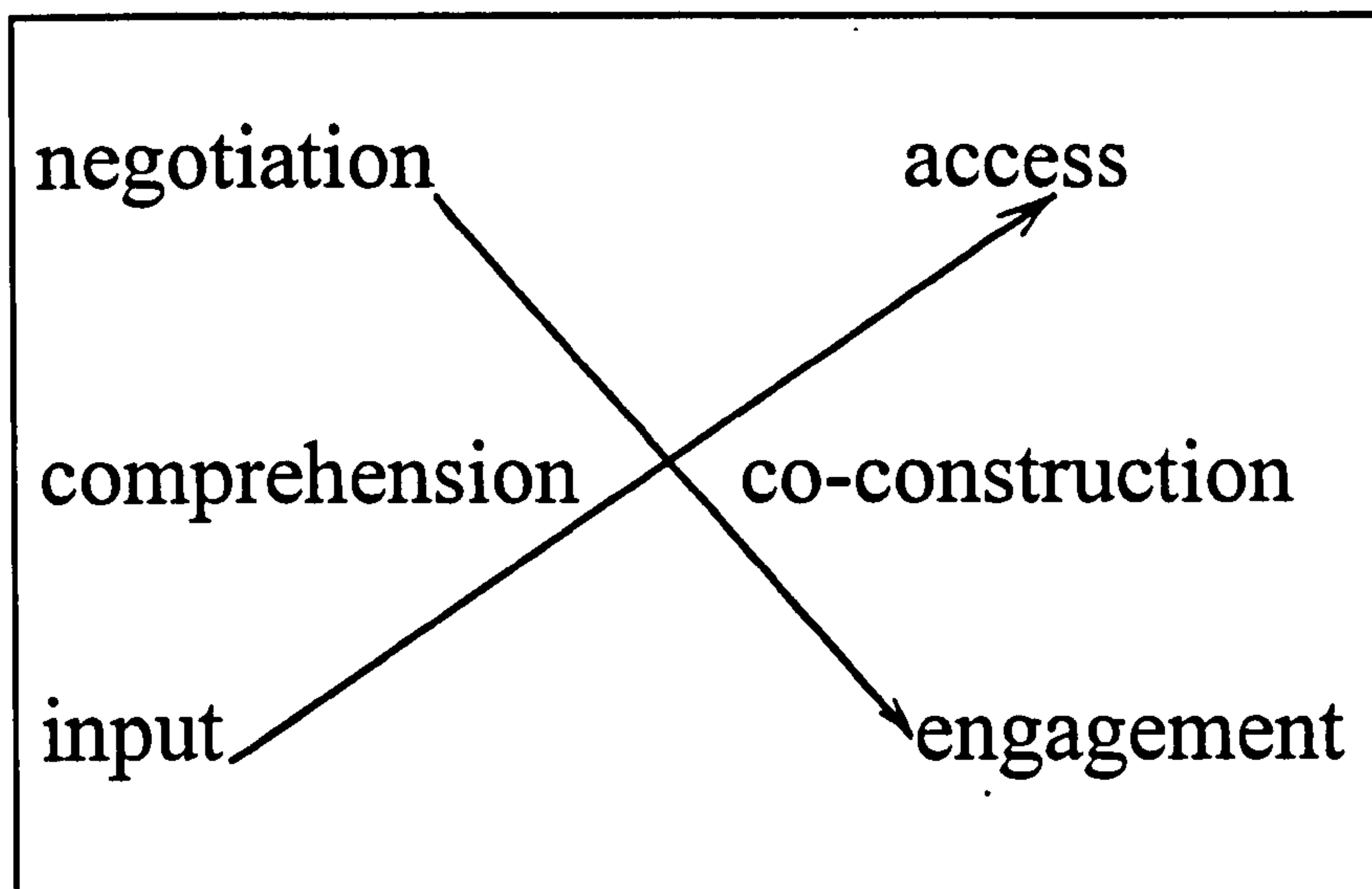
Communication has nothing to do with the conduit metaphor. Rather it has everything to do with how individuals maintain their individuality i.e. self-regulation in the presence of other self-regulated individuals.

(Frawley and Lantolf 1984: 145)

In similar vein, van Lier (1996) also eschews an in-out model. Instead he suggests an alternative model built around social processes which involve the relationships between individuals and groups. Instead of 'comprehensible input', van Lier prefers the term **language engagement** because of quantitative-qualitative and exposure-input confusions surrounding the definition of 'input'. It is therefore in this context that van Lier (1988) advocates an alternative approach which calls for a parameter collapse of the container metaphor and puts social context in the centre (op cit: 76).

It is this linear cause - effect view that needs to be replaced by a more complex view in which cognition, language, learning and a consciousness are in themselves dialogical constructs

(Graumann 1990: 50)



According to this view, input becomes access, negotiation becomes engagement and the metaphor focuses on an ecological interrelationship. In this way the *container metaphor* (input-output which relies on the farmer tilling the field, tending the seed adding fertilizer and water when necessary in order to produce crops) evolves into an *ecological metaphor*, as in a forest where there is a balance of mutually developing parts. This evolution will require a pedagogy guided by a continuous interpretation of the situation and the learners' needs where the perceptions of teachers and learners come together. It will also require the evolution of alternative rules for game playing.

The concept of a learning ecosystem was introduced by Doyle and Ponder (1975) and focuses on the notion of interdependent agents. At one time all agents may be in equilibrium, contributing to effective learning. At other times there may be an imbalance which reduces the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. Gordon et al (1996) extended the concept of ecology to include a classroom ecology. The latter includes elements such as potential for need satisfaction, the classroom climate, group interaction, level and type of class organisation, mechanisms for resolving conflicts,

teaching styles, the physical environment and the wider school ecology. To refine the construct further, Gibson (1979) adds that engagement with language (rather than negotiation) occurs when the learner's internal knowledge system, including language knowledge to date, resonates or interacts with the environment. It is only under such conditions that the exposure-language or input offers learning opportunities or *affordances* (Gibson's term) for the learner. In other words, classroom ecology focuses on a context for learning which allows for the co-construction of the learning environment and social construction of learning between participants, where the goal is the process not the end-product.

In my view, the metaphorical ecological learning environment represents an ideal context for exploring the playing of 'language games', not least because it acknowledges the interplay between the role of language in learning development and the role of learning in language development and promotes the re-conceptualisation of communication towards social interaction and engagement. It also explicitly supports the first of the seven androgogical principles i.e. learning how to learn. It is significant that this is placed first on Whitaker's (and my) list.

As I stated in Chapter 1, in defining a conceptual framework, I wanted to explore effective learning environments and intrinsic, interactive pedagogical moves, which lead to the explicit development of student linguistic and strategic competence. The first part of this chapter has analysed different ways of conceptualising learning and in doing so has highlighted those which have particular relevance for this study. The next stage is to focus on strategic competence.



## **Part 2 : Strategic Competence - exploring the construct**

*In part 2 of this chapter, I shall trace the origins of strategic competence, explore the developments of this construct in recent years and then suggest an alternative perspective which relates more closely to an ecological framework previously discussed.*

### **Introduction: strategies and tactics**

Derived from the Greek 'strategein,' to lead an army, the word strategy has its origins in military 'language'. According to the Collins English Dictionary (1956), strategy is the art of conducting military or naval operations to the best advantage: done by artifice (skilful contrivance, ruse, cunning, skills, strategem). Its association with tactics (the art of manoeuvring military or naval forces) and tactic (a way of achieving something - a course of action, device, move, plan) suggest that strategies are deliberate and cleverly planned moves, in order to achieve a specific goal. Current expressions in common usage have extended far beyond the military context into sport and management terminology, yet goal achievement, intentionality and tactical choice in planning are still implicit in the use of the term 'strategy'. The 1991 Collins edition retains 'planning and conduct of war' but also adds a 'particular long-term plan for success, especially in business or politics'.

According to Bange (1992:75) a strategy is a complex phenomenon, comprising a series of actions chosen and planned with a view to achieving a goal. These actions are dependent on two concepts: intentionality and cognition, or the aims and means of goal accomplishment. Intentionality is also a feature of Kirby's (1998: 230) definition, where

a strategy is defined as a 'combination of tactics, or a choice amongst tactics, that forms a coherent plan to solve a problem.' I shall return to the notion of intentionality later in this chapter.

Within the language teaching and learning context, Richterich (1996) notes that the strategy concept is especially useful in describing what happens during the process because

fundamentally, it implies an acquisition of gain of some kind. In whichever field individuals or groups of individuals apply strategies, they do so not in order to lose, but in order to gain.

(Richterich 1996: 44)

Cohen (1993) usefully suggests a distinction between strategies and tactics, where the former are broad, general and long-term such as hypothesis-testing, and the latter are more specific, lower level and short-term such as using a dictionary (after Seliger 1983). He also warns that equating strategies and tactics potentially leads to strategy lists, containing an unhelpful mixture of long-term and short-term types of behaviour.

Oxford and Cohen (1992) produced a framework for organising language learning strategies with supporting tactics, thus building on the notion that strategies have longer term implications in the learning process than tactics. In this model, a strategy such as embedding new material into long-term memory, might be supported by memory tactics such as imagery, rhyming or imitating. However, no attempt was made to directly relate strategies and tactics to specific tasks.

Within the language learning context, strategies have been categorised in many different ways, including general learning strategies, language learning strategies, learner strategies, communication strategies, interpretative and production strategies and so on. The table on the adjacent page reflects this diversity and McDonough (1999) lists some ways in which strategies have been researched in language learning contexts as follows:

- learning a second language
- learning to learn a language
- performing in and using another language
- communicating in that language
- compensating for breakdowns in communication
- using different language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing)
- coping with processing difficulties

However, the proliferation of terms and concepts, characteristic of learner strategy and related research, has failed to find universally accepted definitions and instead has led to a situation which van Lier (1988: 30) describes as ‘confused and plagued with terminological insecurity’.

### **The interface between strategic and communicative competence**

In Brown’s words (1994: 228), ‘strategic competence occupies a special place in an understanding of communication’. I should briefly like to explore the relationship between strategic and communicative competence and draw on research which supports the view that the former functions independently but interrelatedly to the latter.



Much of the current interest in learner strategy use in the field of second language learning is rooted in work carried out in the 1970s, especially by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) and their descriptions of 'good' language learners. Such studies led to comprehensive Toronto study (Naiman et al. 1978), where the learning traits shared by effective language learners were defined. Whilst such traits implicitly suggest a battery of potential strategies, the identification of personality characteristics, cognitive styles and attitudes of successful learners, did not explicitly distinguish strategies used by the learners whilst engaged in the process of language learning. Brumfit (1995), writing in the introduction to the new edition of Naiman et al's work, comments that since 1978, whilst researchers such as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Ellis (1994) have added more detail to the original study, 'the only really significant addition is the view that good language learners are flexible and vary their learning strategies' (Brumfit 1995: ix).

[I have selected for the reader a range of different interpretations of strategies, which are presented in the table on the following page.]

However, twenty years on from the early work, learning strategies are now firmly on the agenda of the 'good language learner', where strategic competence is identified as one of six components of communicative competence (along with linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, sociocultural and social competences) defined in the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework* (referred to in Chapter 1).

<b>Examples of different interpretations of strategies</b>	
<p>-strategies - overlapping definitions with complementary meanings (McDonough 1999)</p>	<p>guiding principles heuristic estimation compensation mechanism plan for action</p>
<p>-strategies (Dunkin and Biddle 1974)</p>	<p>extended and substantive properties of exchanges amongst teachers and pupils</p>
<p>-basic information processing strategies general learning strategies, common to most educational settings (Weinstein and Mayer 1985)</p>	<p>organisation rehearsal elaboration</p>
<p>-learning strategies (Oxford 1990)</p>	<p>steps taken by students to enhance their own learning</p>
<p>-learning strategies (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 1)</p>	<p>contribute to 'mastering' the language 'special thoughts and behaviours individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information'</p>
<p>-learning strategies (Tarone 1983)</p>	<p>expand linguistic knowledge</p>
<p>-language learning strategies (Oxford 1993: 175)</p>	<p>'specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques that students employ - often consciously - to improve their progress in internalising, storing, retrieving and using the second language'</p>
<p>-communication strategies (Faerch and Kasper 1983)</p>	<p>conscious plans used by a speaker when faced with some difficulty due to 'communicative ends outrunning communicative means'</p>
<p>-communication strategies (Tarone 1983)</p>	<p>mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared</p>
<p>-production strategies (Tarone 1983: 4)</p>	<p>systematic attempts by learners to 'express meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed'</p>

Communicative competence was described by Widdowson in 1983 as 'a complex and still unstable concept', a view reiterated by Little, which states:

Communicative competence is a construct designed not only to describe pre-conditions for successful communicative behaviour but also to facilitate its investigation. Precisely because it is a construct, there is no single specification of its components.

(Little 1996: 13)



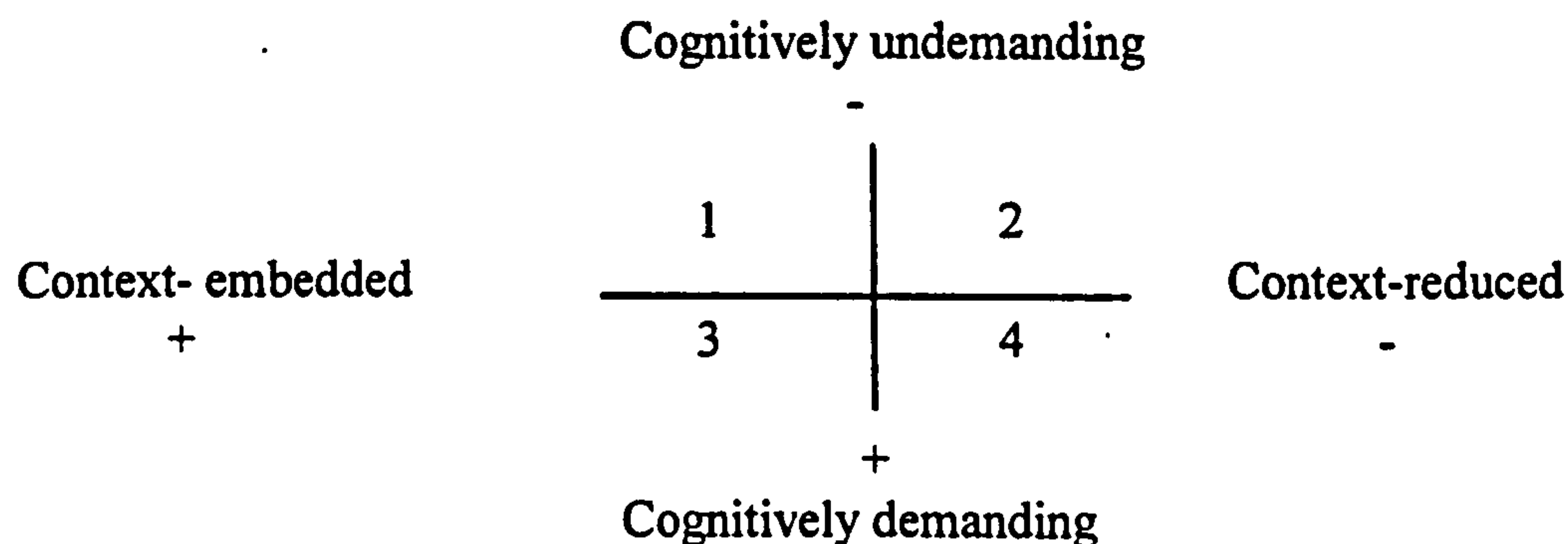
The term 'communicative competence' was first suggested by Hymes (1972) in reaction to Chomsky's narrower view describing the idealised hearer-speaker's knowledge of language, devoid of any so-called performance variables. For Hymes, however, linguistic competence depended on knowledge about language forms, which take account of the social and functional rules of language use. In a similar vein, Sauvignon (1983) suggested that communicative competence depends on knowledge of the language which allows a learner to communicate interactively. 'Communicative competence is relative, not an absolute and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved' (Sauvignon 1983: 9).

In the 1970s, research into communicative competence led to a significant distinction between linguistic and communicative competence i.e. savoir (knowledge about language forms), and savoir faire (knowledge how to function) or the 'what' and the 'how' referred to in part 1 of this chapter. This distinction was further echoed in the work of Cummins (1979, 1980) and Cummins and Swain (1984) where a distinction was made between CALP (cognitive, academic learning proficiency) and BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills). CALP is 'the manipulation of language in decontextualised academic situations' whereas BICS constitutes the 'manifestation of language proficiency in everyday communicative contexts' (1984: 154). As Cummins points out, context-embedded communication derives from interpersonal involvement in shared realities, thereby obviating the need for explicit linguistic detail. Context-reduced communication does not share these realities and therefore more explicit linguistic elaboration is needed. Whilst BICS may rely heavily on sociolinguistic competence, speed of processing and cultural understanding, it is no way inferior to



CALP. Neither are the two dichotomous. Instead, Cummins et al place BICS and CALP on a continuum.

Perhaps the most pertinent application of such a theory to this thesis is from the perspective of two intersecting continua. The first axis plots cognitive involvement from low to high, whereas the second axis plots the nature of the context in which the communicative act takes place i.e. from context-embedded (based on shared realities and paralinguistic support) to context-reduced. This creates four quadrants:



Building on the arguments put forward in Chapter 1 regarding the ‘anodyne’ nature of the potentially demotivating content of many modern language lessons, I would suggest that in fact, BICS has been misinterpreted as representing transactional classroom communication associated with buying tickets and coffee, and CALP as more academic ‘serious’ grammar work. In my experience, in the many instances where a teacher uses a ‘communicative’ approach, genuine face to face communication is still very limited. I have yet to be convinced that simulated and heavily teacher-controlled so-called ‘communicative’ language activities develop BICS beyond the first quadrant (i.e.

cognitively undemanding within a simulated context.) The use of BICS according to Johnstone (1989), enables the learner to encounter important cultural interpersonal meaning through **interaction** in social contexts. The use of CALP on the other hand, encourages learners to ‘attend to a careful selection of words, and to the equally important fashioning of words into clauses, clauses into sentences, sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into coherent texts’ (op cit: 111). Both are essential elements of language use.

I would argue however that much language learning in the early stages tends to be centred around quadrants 1 and 2. An approach which promotes both cognitively and linguistically challenging learning environments will focus more on positioning the learning in quadrant 3, i.e. an ‘acquisition-rich’ context in terms of cognitively engaging tasks which empowers individuals to becoming more linguistically creative. According to Johnstone’s advice:

It makes sense for teachers promoting BICS to reach towards CALP by raising the cognitive level and extending the discourse.

(op cit: 118)

He goes on to suggest that CALP should equally draw on BICS by enabling learners to participate in debates and discussions in a context which promotes interaction by making both cognitive and linguistic demands on learners. Thus, in my view, the work of Cummins contributes greatly to relating the importance of **context** to communicative competence. Again, I shall return to the issue of context later.

Widdowson, in his 1983 study, developed the construct of communicative competence still further, by including social rules based on the appropriate use of linguistic forms.

This refinement extended communicative competence to crucially include linguistic competence. According to this way of thinking, communicative competence is to do with both knowledge and ability, with both state and process, with grammatical understanding and pragmatic application.

However, it was Canale and Swain's (1980) seminal work on communicative competence which advocated a particular and, at the time, widely-accepted interpretation of strategic competence, by including it as one of **four** components of communicative competence, namely grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic. Both grammatical and discourse components (i.e. linguistic knowledge at the sentence and intersentential level) were linked to linguistic competence and the use of language itself, whereas the sociolinguistic component was linked to communicative or pragmatic competence, i.e. the functional aspects of communication. The fourth component, strategic competence was first and foremost linked to compensation strategies which made up for weaknesses in grammatical or pragmatic competence. Strategic competence was defined thus:

The verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence.

(Canale and Swain 1980: 30)

Whilst Swain (1984) amended the earlier definition of communicative competence to include enhancement techniques within the strategic competence, nonetheless the construct retained its defensive and compensatory image. As Brown points out 'definitions... that are limited to the notion of 'compensatory strategies' fall short of



encompassing the full spectrum of the construct' (1994: 228). Accordingly, Brown maintains that strategic competence has a much broader application in that it enables the learner to manipulate language in order to meet communicative goals.

However, perhaps it is Bachman's (1990) work which encapsulated significant developments in thinking with regard to strategic competence almost a decade ago. Bachman believed that strategic competence should not be limited to a component of communicative competence, but should be seen as a more general cognitive capacity in its own right, triggered for example during specific activities such as problem-solving tasks, which enables an individual to 'make the most effective use of available abilities in carrying out a given task' (op cit: 106). In fact, Bachman replaces the term communicative competence with communicative language ability (CLA), or 'knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualised communicative language use' (op cit: 84). He includes three essential components of strategic competence, which focus on supporting learning:

- An assessment component, where an individual 'assesses' the demands of the individual communicative task in terms of identification of information needed and language competences required in order to achieve the communicative goal i.e. setting communicative goals in order to gain 'control.'
- A planning component consisting of the retrieval of grammatical, textual, illocutionary, sociolinguistic knowledge from an individual's linguistic repertoire.

It is the function of strategic competence to match the new information to be processed with the relevant information that is available and snap onto [...] the use of existing language abilities.

(op cit: 102)

- An execution component which activates a plan to accomplish the appropriate goals within given context, i.e. implementing the plan.

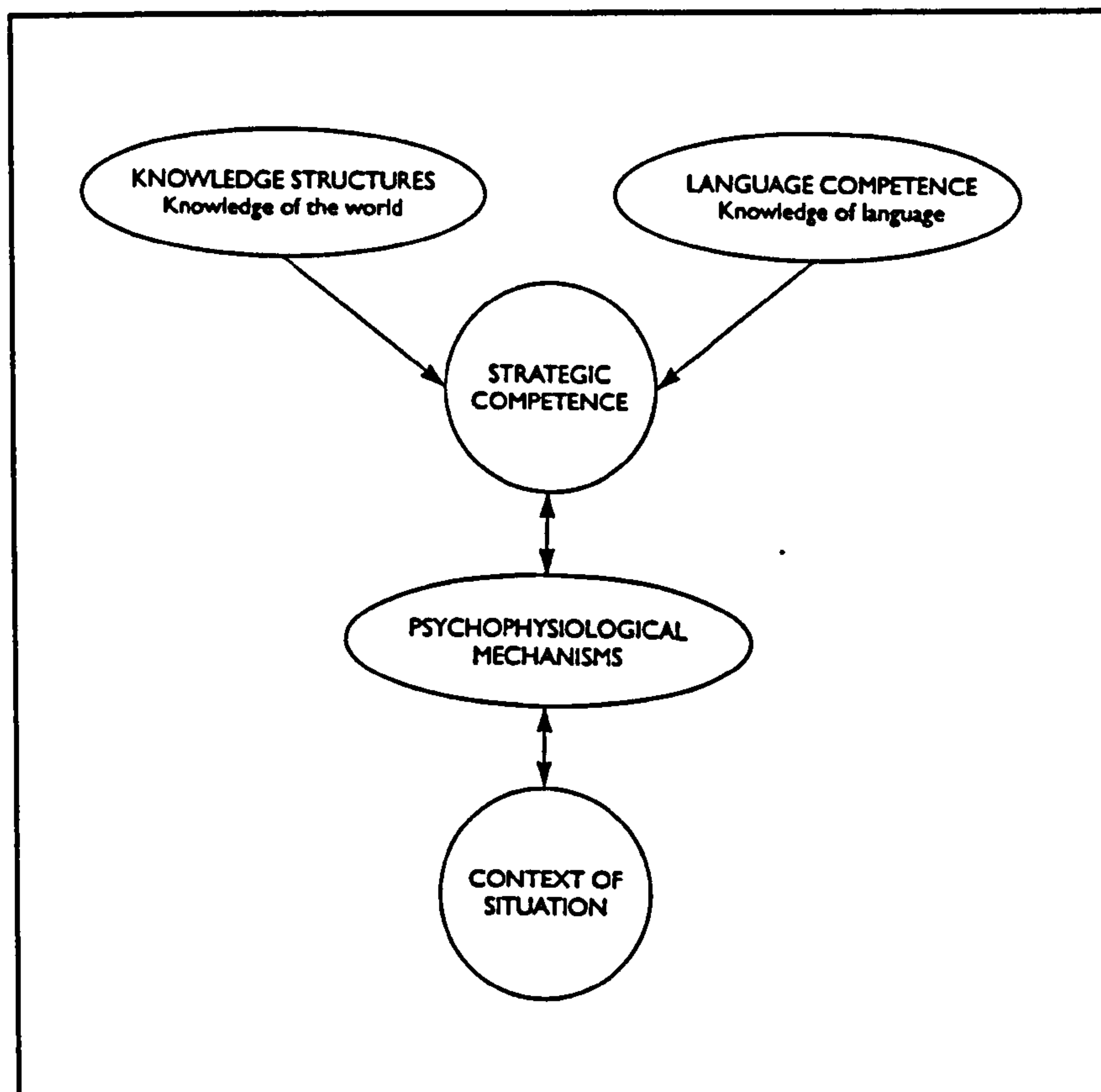
Throughout, the importance of the **context** of communication is emphasised. According to Bachman then, strategic competence is seen as the capacity that relates

language competence or knowledge of language, to the language user's knowledge structures and the features of the context in which communication takes place ... [it] performs assessment, planning and execution functions in determining the most effective means of achieving a communicative goal

(op cit: 108)

This definition elevates strategic competence to the function of making the 'final decision', whilst clarifying the roles of language competence and strategy competence. In this model, communicative competence feeds into strategic competence rather than the reverse. Whilst Bachman details the sub-components or strategies which constitute linguistic knowledge or competence (including organisational and pragmatic competence) as well as world knowledge or subject content competence in the school setting, essentially both linguistic and content competence feed into the individual's overall strategic competence. This view has contributed significantly to shifting my own thinking during the process of deconstructing strategic competence, since it separates strategic and communicative competence and thereby supports the fundamental belief that language is used to learn as well as to communicate.

## Components of communicative language ability



(Bachman, 1990: 85)

### Reconstructing strategic competence: from learning to learner strategies

There are many different approaches to classifying learning strategies which support different types of learning:

- using strategies for *different skills* such as reading, speaking

(Rampillon 1985)

- distinguishing *different functions* of strategies for information processing

(Weinstein and Mayer 1986)

- differentiating between *different goals* the strategies are aimed at

(Wolff 1999)



- distinguishing between *cognitive and metacognitive* strategies  
(O'Malley and Chamot 1990)
- distinguishing between *direct and indirect* learning strategies (Oxford 1990)
- signalling *different hierarchical levels* of strategy use  
(Oxford and Cohen 1992)

In terms of different learning strategy classifications, Little (1996: 25) cites the work of Faerch and Kasper (1983), Naiman (1978), Rubin (1987), Wenden and Rubin (1987), Oxford (1989), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Stern (1992), of which the most comprehensive is that of Oxford. Not only did she identify a taxonomy of strategies but then suggested ways of teaching them. Oxford outlined a wide variety of learning and communication strategies, distinguishing, as stated above, between direct and indirect categories. Fifty specific strategies are listed under six general categories: direct strategies comprise memory, cognitive and compensatory strategies; indirect strategies are defined as metacognitive, affective and social strategies. The strategies are framed in an inventory, the SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) which is currently one of the most widely used tools for determining strategy use by learners. Indeed, I shall explore its use in more detail in the next part of the thesis in Research Episode 1.

In addition to Oxford's work, one of the more recent and extensive reviews on strategies in the language learning context comes from O'Malley and Chamot (op cit 1990) who take up the *savoir* and *savoir faire* distinction and differentiate between cognitive or learning strategies, metacognitive or learning how to learn strategies and social mediation, such as cooperation and asking for clarification.

However, Grenfell and Harris (1998) critique their work on the grounds of imprecise definitions and arbitrary strategy classifications. I cite this criticism in full, since for me it typifies the current confusion and dilemma in the field:

The taxonomy is overly broad and does not capture the complexity of the process.... it is also narrow since it pays little attention to research into communication strategies... such a lack of clarity is unhelpful and obscures the underlying processes involved in language learning and manifest in the way the learner is coping with language, which is demonstrated in strategy use.

(op cit: 25)

Echoing this view, McDonough (1999) notes that criticism has been levelled at all the previously mentioned ways of dividing and labelling strategies. It seems that a proliferation of classifying strategies has led to an array of taxonomies and lists of strategies available for use by learners, without extensive or substantiated evidence of how these are actually used in real contexts by individual learners.

An interesting recent development, however, is signified by an increase in the use of the term 'learner strategy' rather than 'learning strategy' (Cohen, 1998; Wenden and Rubin, 1987). Grenfell and Harris (op cit) distinguish between learning and learner strategies, rejecting the former as 'too broad, too concerned with surface phenomena and academic learning skills', in favour of learner strategies which include 'all those thoughts and processes and products immanent in engaging with language tasks.' (op cit: 25)

This view concurs with McDonough's position (1999), where he states that the term learner strategy foregrounds the learner's active participation in the learning process



not simply as a performer....but as a problem-solver and reflective organiser of the knowledge and skills on offer in the language exposure and required for effective language learning.

(McDonough op cit: 2)

Whilst I particularly support McDonough's view, for me the potential of the construct 'learner strategy' is that it opens up the context of learning beyond a narrowly defined curricular classroom. There has been a recent upsurge in interest in thinking skills programmes such as *CASE* (Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education), *CAME* (Cognitive Acceleration through Mathematics Education) and *Thinking in Geography* (Leat, 1998). A recent DfEE research publication *From Thinking Skills to Thinking Classrooms* (McGuinness 1999), reports on the use of thinking skills across the curriculum, and developing strategies which learners can use and transfer from one learning context to another.

**Raising standards requires that attention is directed not only on what is to be learned but on how children learn and how teachers intervene to achieve this.**

(op cit: 5)

[My emboldening]

It became increasingly clear, that developing children's thinking goes far beyond an understanding of how children learn. Issues to do with curricular design, availability of curricular materials, the nature of pedagogy, teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching as well as their professional development come to the fore. Perhaps it is not surprising that the emphasis has shifted from thinking as a skill to concepts such as thinking curriculum, thinking classrooms and schools for thought.

(op cit: 25)

I find this view of strategic learning exciting, since it points the way to experimenting with an alternative set of articulated rules which explicitly promote learning and thinking. This approach provides for learning which focusses on cognitive as well as



metacognitive development in an explicit as well as implicit way. This approach also assumes that explicit training in metacognitive awareness does make a difference, but that training also needs to be supported in other implicit ways - 'thinking classrooms' and 'thinking schools' implies a holistic philosophy.

### **Towards consciousness and control: developing strategic competence**

In terms of learner training, this leads onto the issue of consciousness, since in the early part of this section, the notion of learner 'intentionality' or 'conscious' strategy use by the learner, was explicit in many of the definitions of strategies (Bange, 1992; Cohen, 1993). The underlying assumption that learners exert some kind of conscious control over their strategic repertoire, that they can select from a range of strategies available to them and evaluate their effectiveness, is reflected in phrases such as 'systematic attempts' or 'specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques that students employ often consciously'.

Cohen (1990) dismisses sub-consciousness as a process rather than behaviour and thus concentrates on consciousness as an essential condition for strategy use. Weinstein and Mayer (op cit) uphold this view, whereas Faerch and Kasper (op cit) take a middle stand arguing that strategies are 'potentially' conscious. Cohen attempts to resolve the consciousness debate by referring to strategy training. He argues that if learners can be trained to use strategies more effectively, then this training must operate above the level of consciousness.

A range of training materials is available (Ellis and Sinclair 1989, Willing 1989;

Chamot's CALLA 1996, Wenden 1991, Weaver and Cohen 1997), yet empirical validation of strategic teaching is both inconsistent and inconclusive, although some success is demonstrable, (Oxford, 1996; Nunan, 1997; Weaver and Cohen, 1997; McDonough, 1995). There is some disillusionment with strategy training which led in certain instances to an over-use of ticking lists of strategies to be trialed as decontextualised fixed formulae, echoing the manner in which grammatical exercises had been used a decade previously.

Schneider and Weinert (1990) identify three major accomplishments of strategy training research, namely: a deeper awareness of how strategy-knowledge develops; cognitive and metacognitive ways which represent strategy-knowledge interactions; and importance of affective and cultural factors in the analysis of strategy-knowledge. Such evidence suggests that some strategies are consciously and intentionally applied. On the other hand research carried out by Wenden and Rubin (op cit) and Bongaerts and Poulisse (1989) suggest whilst certain strategies seem to be consciously deployed, others are automatised and stay below the level of consciousness.

It is Bialystok's (1990) view on strategy use, however, which I find particularly provocative. She argues from a process-oriented perspective on language learning and contends that if strategies are consciously selected and used by the learner, then it follows that the individual should also be aware of this procedure and be able to reflect upon and articulate the process. Since this is not always the case, Bialystok argues that

It is difficult to treat consciousness as a determining variable, primarily because



the conditions of consciousness seem so elusive. At the point at which we can articulate a principle, it seems clear that we are conscious of it, but it is also possible that the articulation brought the structure into consciousness. In this case, consciousness is not a prediction of the analysis necessary to support articulation, but rather a consequence of it.

(1990: 12)

The issue here then is complicated by the notion that consciousness does not necessarily imply an awareness of the processing, but rather that it gives access to the products of the processing which can be articulated by the learners or others. The relationship between articulation and consciousness-raising will play a part in my own research and is discussed further in Research Episode 3.

However, a debate which focusses on if or when strategic competence operates above or below the level of consciousness, misses the point. Strategic is not a 'fixed' state but depends on (and here I return to my previous citation of Bachman) 'features of the context in which communication takes place' i.e. it relates directly to the contextual task in which the learners are engaged. Some tasks may lend themselves to explicit learner analysis as suggested by the work of Di Pietro (1987) or Poulisse, where 'consciousness raising is a matter of deploying techniques that encourage learners to reflect on their performance' (reported in Little 1996: 24); others may not.

Returning to Bachman's schematisation, the importance of planning as a fundamental component of strategic competence is emphasised. Whilst the term 'planning' on the one hand implies a conscious and intentional activity, based on psycholinguistic evidence (Clark and Clark 1977), one can also infer that this too operates sometimes above and below the level of consciousness, depending on the context. Situational variables such



as individual learner characteristics, the nature of communication (eg routine/non-routine, automatic/non-automatic, reflective) and the context of communication (eg requiring immediate/non-immediate response) in fact have a crucial role to play. Little suggests that the very nature of learning a second language may 'force' learners to operate more regularly above the level of consciousness as compared with native speakers. He points out that the tools of intentional planning are in fact learning strategies and that

when communicative tasks permit or require intentional planning, intentionally deployed learning strategies become part of strategic competence, which in this domain operates to some extent above the level of conscious awareness.

(op cit: 27)

Little also usefully differentiates between variables referred to by Bachman such as immediate and non-immediate task responses, where the latter allows the learner time to engage in intentional planning. Little succinctly sums this up as follows:

The deployment of learning strategies - strategic control of the learning process - contributes with varying degrees of directness/indirectness to the development of the learner's strategic competence: indirectly as regards performance of immediate-response reciprocal tasks, somewhat more directly as regards the performance of non-immediate reciprocal tasks, and very directly as regards the performance of non-immediate non-reciprocal tasks, where learning strategies are themselves the tools of intentional planning that learners need to call on in language use.

(op cit: 33)

It would appear then, that the use of consciously deployed strategies may help to develop those below the level of consciousness, which in turn will play a role in the language development of the individual. This goes some way to explaining Bialystok's view (1990) that effectively to develop strategic competence, learners need language not

strategies.

Finally, I should like to relate strategic competence to the notion of learner 'control.' If the ultimate learning goal is to become an autonomous learner and gain control of one's learning, one might deduce that the deployment of effective strategies may potentially facilitate that process. According to Little (op cit), strategic competence takes account of the learner's strategic control of the language learning process, i.e. strategies enable the learner to exercise some control over the learning process and in doing so contribute to the development of a learner's strategic competence.

### **Summary**

During the past ten years, research in the field of strategic competence, has suggested that the context in which the learning takes place directly affects the nature of the strategies deployed by individual learners (Bachman 1990). For example, Cummins et al. place particular emphasis on context in terms of the interplay between cognitive and linguistic demands it makes on learners. Other proponents of this view believe that language proficiency varies according to each communicative episode - it is not a fixed state. In other words, different demands imposed on the learner by the learning context will equally demand the deployment of different strategies. Given that context plays a such a fundamental role in strategy use, then it follows that strategies can be related to specific tasks in specific contexts i.e. tasks which have their origins in the learning community of the classroom, also have goals or objectives. Depending on how goal-oriented individual learners are in response to the task, will determine the strategies they use. Thus, some strategies, as defined by research cited so far, will and can involve

intentional and conscious behaviours on the part of the learner, others quite simply will not. The crucial point here is that strategic competence is in part linked to the conscious and subconscious use of strategies by individual learners and that learners can benefit from both explicit and implicit exposure to tasks which will trigger strategic behaviour. According to Bialystok this constitutes the language itself, since we not only use language to communicate but also to learn.

At this point in my quest, it seems that my own research focus should concentrate on the strategic use of language by different learners in a variety of learning contexts, which demonstrate what learners do in order to gain control of the learning process. I shall conclude this chapter with a quotation from Little:

If language learners are fully involved in the discourse of the classroom as a matter of course, their capacity for autonomous learning will grow from the inside out; and if the discourse of the classroom is as far as possible conducted in the target language, the learners' strategic competence will develop even as they learn to exercise strategic control over the learning process.

(op cit: 30)



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **DEFINING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Introduction**

In selecting a theoretical stance for this study, its application had to provide a context within which fundamental questions about language, learning and strategic competence which had been posed in the preceding chapters could be advanced. It also had to respond to those issues and arguments raised in Chapter 2, so that rather than espousing an eclectic view of language learning and acquisition, a research framework might be co-constructed which would enable a specific and defined theoretical base to be used to explore and analyse effective classroom language learning environments.

The recent renewal of interest in L S Vygotsky (1896 -1934) and his work, continues to have a powerful and positive influence on contemporary thinking. The overall unifying qualities of his work seem to have pertinent implications for this thesis and therefore I should like to examine key elements of his theories in order to re-position my own views before applying them to a more 'ecological' learning environment.

In essence Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning and development embodies a unified perspective on cognitive development. It emphasises the crucial contribution of the societal context and the interpersonal relationships contained within it to the development of individual cognition. Moreover, this socio-cultural approach is embedded in educational theory, where education is seen as an accelerator of a child's cognitive development and as such combines socio-cultural and -cognitive thinking. Jerome Bruner

in his prologue to a translated version of Vygotsky's *Collected Works* (1987) notes:

When I remarked a quarter of a century ago that Vygotsky's view of development was also a theory of education, I did not realise the half of it. In fact, his educational theory is a theory of cultural transmission as well as a theory of development. 'Education' implies for Vygotsky not only the development of the individual's potential, but the historical expression and growth of the human culture from which Man springs.

(Bruner in Vygotsky 1987: 2)

Whilst there is some debate regarding the exact translation of the Russian word *obrazovani* (education) with its emphasis on formation by external forces and *obuchenie* (teaching) which in Russian can also be interpreted as teaching and learning i.e. a double-sided process (Cole in Valsiner 1988), the basic tenets of his theories have made important contributions to current pedagogical debate.

It is important however, to place Vygotsky in the socio-political context of the time in which he was writing, i.e. post-revolutionary Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, influenced by Marxist ideologies under the Stalinist regime. In fact his writings did not gain recognition outside the USSR until the 1970s. Owing to his premature death in 1934, some of his theories were in embryonic form and others left to his successors to develop, modify or interpret, working in a different socio-political arena. Asmolov (1986) warns against 'the canonisation of the basic principles of a theory [which] entails much greater dangers than any criticism from within or without', and Tulviste (1988:6) talks of the 'one-sided glorification of Vygotsky'. Johnson Laird (in Daniels 1996:3) believes that not only was Vygotsky's work ill-informed on some basic matters but he also lacked the necessary linguistic tools to articulate sufficiently his theory. Vygotsky's work then is in some respects contentious and has been widely interpreted over the years.



It is interesting to note for example that Western researchers have chosen to ignore his general genetic law of cultural development. Instead social (interpersonal) and individual (intrapersonal) interactions have been emphasised as a setting for development, with a focus on individual (self) and mediational (intervention) processes. The Russians however, placed greater importance on the role played by larger social contexts in the development of human 'knowing', embedded clearly in the Marxist tradition of the time. However, for me this does not pose a problem provided that one is aware of those contexts and interpretations. Indeed, it could be argued that by further developing and adding to his theories, we are in fact continuing in the Vygotskian tradition since we are shaped by and through socio-historical elements and our 'knowing' is directly linked to that which is 'cultural'.

The current upsurge of interest in Vygotsky's work has been marked by new translations and editions of his key texts, numerous quotations and references as well as experimental pedagogical applications of his theories. According to Werstch (1985), keen interest in Vygotskian theory is in response to a particular need amongst Western researchers, theoreticians and practitioners alike who are actively seeking new theoretical frameworks - not least because his writings have direct relevance to education. From my perspective, the Vygotskian approach to education and learning should advance not only a critical view on current practice but should also provide a means to assess that criticality through application and by pointing to possible ways forward.

In order to advance this thesis, I intend not to debate Vygotskian theory and its developments or 'fate' (Werstch op cit), but to focus on key strands of his work which



can be applied to the issues raised by an alternative 'language games' context. I am also mindful of Byrne's critique (in *Applied Linguistics*, No 18, 1997) of some of the research contained in the publication *Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research*, edited by Lantolf and Appel (1994). Although I concur with Byrnes in her acknowledgement that some of the research in this publication is particularly inspirational, and can be described as a:

deeply thought-provoking reminder of issues the entire field faces when it increasingly invokes an explicitly inter-disciplinary orientation in order to divest itself of hereto dominant and often restrictive paradigms in theory and research  
(Byrnes 1997:352)

I was also anxious to address her harsh criticism of some of the work which she questions as follows:

I am more concerned about analysing from a Vygotskian perspective research that was done with very different research presuppositions and intentions.  
(ibid.)

Thus on the one hand I wished to explore this 'interdisciplinarity' which Byrnes promotes as 'a new mode of inquiry which is more than a concatenation of disciplines' (ibid.) whilst on the other, ensuring that my research was rigorously focussed on exploring how Vygotskian theory might account for L2 development in teenage learners and the optimum conditions in which that development might take place.

From the onset it is important to acknowledge that Vygotskian theory is centred on child development and mother tongue language development. There is no theory of second language acquisition for example and in fact Vygotsky saw foreign language learning as being quite separate from mother tongue language development - a view which I intend to reassess later in part 2 of this chapter. It is however the central role of language as

mediation in the learning process, which advocates that the development of a child's ability to control his or her own cognitive processes is contingent upon mastery of language, which holds such potential both in a general pedagogical sense (education) and a more specific one (modern foreign language learning) - a view which echoes the concluding part of the previous chapter.

In order to focus on the theoretical underpinning of this thesis, I have selected the following strands prevalent in Vygotskian theory, which I believe are integral to this study. These are:

- the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
- consciousness, mediation and self regulation
- social speech, private speech and inner speech

In part 1 of this chapter, I shall briefly explore each one in turn in order to demonstrate its contribution to formulating a theoretical framework for learning. In part 2, I shall draw on research in the field, which lays the foundation for applying Vygotskian theories to foreign language learning, and which offer an alternative analytical paradigm.

## **Part 1: Pertinent paths and powerful principles**

### **Key strands in Vygotskian theory**

#### **The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

The ZPD brings together Vygotsky's general psychological perspective on child development with a pedagogical one in so much as he believed that psychological development and instruction (education) are socially embedded. Although Vygotsky did not develop this theory fully before his death, it is the potential of the ZPD which has most excited later theorists and practitioners alike and probably contributed most to the potential application of Vygotsky's work to the pedagogical context.

Quoting from the 1978 edition of *Mind in Society*, Vygotsky describes the zone for an individual as:

the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

(Vygotsky 1978: 86)

In other words the ZPD defines functions within an individual which have not yet matured but which are **in the process of maturing** i.e. using Vygotsky's images the 'buds' or 'flowers' of development - not the 'fruits'. Therefore what is in the zone today has the potential to be developed tomorrow. Interestingly, in the original Russian version, the term more accurately translates as the zone of 'nearest' rather than proximal development (Minick 1987).



In his 'mother-tongue' experiments, Vygotsky presented young learners with a problem-solving task beyond their current capabilities. After the introduction of an additional 'tool', he observed how the object or other person became integrated into the task. Hence he was studying the formation of processes or behaviour by an analysis of the way in which the individual engaged in the task. Vygotsky claimed that unlike more traditional routes, his methods gave him access to hidden processes that manifested themselves only as the individual interacted with his or her environment. Learning therefore in his sense, activates a variety of developmental processes which are operationalised through the child's interaction with others - adults or peers. This learning or knowledge - *understood knowledge*- then becomes internalised into the individual's independent repertoire as *independent knowledge* (Hedegaard's terms, 1988) and thus the transformation of intermental to intramental functioning is charted.

Unlike the Piaget or Skinner schools of thought, for Vygotsky development processes succeed learning processes. As a child assimilates a new concept for example, the developmental process begins since it forms the basis for the subsequent development of emergent more complex internal processing. This represents a significant shift in the more accepted view of learning. Vygotsky insisted however that these processes are highly complex, dynamic and volatile. Development does not necessarily coincide with or follow learning in a 'shadow-like way' nor is it linear as an input-output model of learning might suggest (Daniels 1996).

Schaffer (1992) notes that whilst the linking of social skills to the social context was generally accepted, Vygotsky's notion of tying the development of cognitive skills to the

same social context was met with some scepticism. It is clear however that this theory has profound implications for pedagogy, since Vygotsky believed that the analysis of the relationship between the social and the psychological is fundamentally concerned with development and learning and as such lays a huge responsibility for child development in the domain of formal education.

Inherent in the concept of the ZPD is the notion of scaffolding. If the difference between an individual's ability to solve problems alone and to solve them with assistance or collaboration lies in the ZPD, then the image of support as scaffolding is an appropriate one. The term came into use in the 1980s and taken to its logical conclusion implies that gradual and appropriate withdrawal of scaffolding (such as teacher support or that of other 'experts' including peers) will facilitate the gradual transfer of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the individual (Rogoff and Gardner, 1984, in Ashman and Conway, 1997). As Ashman underlines (op cit), scaffolding involves two stages: the first is to do with the reciprocal relationship between 'expert' and 'novice', where the teacher provides content and focus whilst the learner is actively involved in increasing both knowledge and skills; the second involves a progressive transfer of responsibility for initiating the learning from the teacher or other learners to the learner him or herself, where the learner takes control. Individual participation is thus central to Vygotsky's learning theory based on continual negotiation and renegotiation in the ZPD of the meaning of the societal context. As such, a child's understanding and experiences are constantly interacting and mutually constitutive. Language plays a pivotal role in this interaction.



## **Consciousness, mediation and self-regulation**

### **Consciousness**

Vygotsky defines consciousness as ‘the objectively observable organisation of behaviour that is imposed on humans through participation in socio-cultural practices’ (Werstch 1985: 187). He believed that consciousness was the highest level of mental activity and as such separates humans from other forms of animal life. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Vygotsky also believed that consciousness should and could be an object of research. However, he rejected the notion that consciousness could be explored or explained through consciousness (i.e. behaviour) since for him consciousness and human behaviour were inseparable. In this way he rejected the approaches of the Pavlovian scholars (reflexology) and the Wurzburg school (introspective). As Spinoza (in Ilyvenkov 1977) so aptly illustrates, thinking cannot be explained by describing the brain any more than walking can be explained by a description of the human leg, since both thinking and walking are functions of the organ. Hence Vygotsky wished to establish an explanatory principle or a unit of analysis ‘that reflects a reality and on the basis of which the totality of mental processes is explained’ (in Davydov and Radzikhovski 1985: 86). He therefore postulated that consciousness could be explained by investigating humans and their interaction with each other by their engagement in concrete and symbolic activity.

This stance, whilst sympathetic to the works of George Mead, Karl Marx and Pierre Janet, was at odds with views more generally held. The definition of socially meaningful activity led Vygotsky to disagree fundamentally with his Kharkov contemporaries. Luria (1981) explains Vygotsky’s position as follows:



In order to explain the highly complex forms of human consciousness one must go beyond the human organism. One must seek the origins of conscious activity in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence.

(Luria 1981: 54)

Vygotsky went on to identify two sub-components of consciousness which are dynamically interconnected and which continually transform one another through a complex interrelationship i.e. intellect and affect. In essence then, it is consciousness which organises human activity, socio-cognitive in nature but through intellectual and affective processes. Hence it follows that if Vygotsky promotes socially meaningful activity as a generator of human consciousness, the study of that interaction in its concrete and symbolic forms, will lead us to a greater understanding of the nature of human consciousness itself.

### **Mediation**

There is evidence to suggest (Bakhurst 1986) that in his final works Vygotsky had developed a clearer understanding of psychological processing and social activity. He proposed that central to human activity is a focus on meaning which is dependent for activation on mediating 'tools' such as symbols, signs and language. Mediation then refers to the need for someone or something other than the learner to intervene in the process. Since meaning is socially constructed, Vygotsky argued that the role of mediation goes some way towards explaining how an individual gains and internalises knowledge. In other words, it is not through a simple process of transmission that the social becomes individual, since the same individuals must construct their own sense from available meanings.

Human consciousness then is fundamentally a mediated mental activity which relies on 'tools' to activate it. Mediating 'tools' can either be of an externally-oriented material nature or an internally-oriented psychological nature. Material 'tools' differ significantly from psychological 'tools' such as language, algebraic symbols, mnemonics. Material tools are the object of activity whereas psychological tools become the subject. 'Tools' have developed because of the human need to control both the external and internal world.

To become conscious of a mental operation means to transfer it from the plane of action to that of language i.e. to recreate it in the imagination so that it can be expressed in words.

(Vygotsky 1962: 88)

It becomes clear that as such language is the most powerful semiotic 'tool' since it also functions as a psychological one in the construction of individual consciousness. This does not however imply a causal relationship i.e. that language causes consciousness or vice versa, but that both are inextricably linked. To borrow van Lier's term language and consciousness are 'like two sides of a coin' (van Lier 1994: 71).

It is important to point out that whilst mediated action is dependent on 'tools' which fundamentally and inherently shape that action, it is not reduced to the level of the 'tools'. Both components of the action are involved (i.e. individual and 'tool') and each individual will use the mediator in a different creative way. As Bakhtin (1981: 131) explains, 'speaking involves an individual in a unique setting using language tools provided by others to create utterances'. This theme, which has already been touched upon in the previous chapter, has great potential when applied directly to the teaching and learning of a foreign language. If the growth of language involves the growth of



consciousness and consciousness is essential for the individual to achieve ultimate self-regulation or control, then language is fundamental to learning.

According to Vygotsky, mediated activity enables natural human ability and skills of a biological and lower order (such as senses, natural memory, involuntary attention) to be transformed into higher mental functions of a socio-cultural higher order (such as logical memory, conceptual thought, problem-solving, planning). Higher order skills are often regarded in current educational contexts as having metacognitive value and strategic 'currency'.

### **Self-regulation**

Vygotsky viewed consciousness as more than an awareness of an individual's cognitive abilities but rather a construct which is comprised of self-regulatory mechanisms that the individual uses to solve problems. Regulation therefore in the Vygotskian sense, although a relative phenomenon, is to do with the amount of control an individual exerts over her or his own environment. Although there are three identifiable stages of regulation, these are neither static nor absolute but relative to individual activities. Hence a learner might be at different stages according to the activity in which he or she is engaged.

Initially, in the early stages of development, a child is unable to exert much control over the environment and so is unable to act independently unless the goal is directly evident. This is known as object-regulation. As the child begins to take more control, especially through language mediation and dialogic speech, she or he is engaged in intermental functioning known as other-regulation. Self-regulation, the final stage involves the



individual in intramental functioning which implies that a large share of the responsibility for independent strategic functioning lies with the individual.

A coherent link then emerges between consciousness, mediation and self regulation i.e. if consciousness is comprised in part of self-regulatory mechanisms necessary for learning and problem solving, and in turn self-regulation is acquired through mediation during the stages of object and other-regulation, then this interdependency between functioning processes means that in the Vygotskian sense these constructs are inherently and inextricably related.

### **Social speech, private speech and inner speech**

According to Vygotsky, speech serves two functions. The primary function of speech is a social one - to communicate. The second involves vital intra personal and cognitive processing, which allows an individual to internalise and take control of her or his environment.

A child's early speech is social since it signals the setting out along the route to self-regulation. Whilst still in the object-regulated phase, a child's speech evokes responses reinforced by adults and others and as language grows, it assumes an increasing role as second signal system which powerfully affects the environment. Therefore speech begins to bifurcate into adult social speech and internal 'speech' - both having very different yet interrelated functions.

Vygotsky's problem-solving experiments with young children in the mother-tongue

(such as how to obtain candy which is out of reach) led him to conclude that 'children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech as well as their eyes and hands', i.e. they use egocentric or private speech to assist their problem solving (Vygotsky 1978: 27). Current theoreticians prefer to use the term **private speech** after Flavell (1966), reported in Lantolf and Appel 1994: 15) rather than egocentric speech. Moreover, other experimental investigations such as those by Sokolov (1972) and more recently De Guerrero (1990) and McCafferty (1992) assert that the amount of private speech increases in relation to the difficulty of the task. Thus it would appear, that private speech has a clearly defined strategic function - a notion which will be of significant importance to this thesis.

In addition, a child's private speech is closely related to the form of his or her social speech as for example when a child appeals for assistance whilst solving a task. Egocentric speech is accessible in 3 year olds, but more incomprehensible in 7 year olds. The older the child, the more thoroughly have the thoughts been internalised (Emerson 1986 in Daniels 1996:131). However, there is one crucial aspect of Vygotsky's theory which isolates him from the Piagetian view that child developmental stages are irreversible - namely his Principle of Continuous Access. This postulates that private speech does not disappear as social speech takes over, it continues to play a central role in the development of cognitive activity - it simply 'goes underground.' It can re-emerge at any time as it is needed depending on the task to be solved. This crucially allows for the functioning of what can be termed Vygotsky's 'dynamic quality of mental activity'. In Daniel's words (1996:10) 'the social voice becomes the inner voice'. In this sense, inner speech is a result of constructive and developmental processes where speech from

and with others (intermental) becomes speech for self (intramental). Thus, inner speech enables humans to plan and self-regulate their actions.

According to Vygotsky, private speech (thinking aloud in Piagetian theory) grows out of social foundations. It transfers social and collaborative forms of behaviour (intermental) into the realms of an individual's psychological functioning (intramental). There it becomes inner speech.

In his 1932 critique of Piaget's work, Vygotsky expounded his theory of Functional Differentiation. He proposed that private speech is not a transitional stage between social and inner speech, but that characteristics unique to both reflect the changing use of speech within the individual. Private speech represents 'an externalisation of the inner order as the individual attempts to regain control of his cognitive functioning' (Lantolf and Appel 1994:15). Thus even at an adult stage, the individual can never be a completely autonomous 'knower', but an organism which reverts to and uses earlier knowing stages in order to gain self-regulation at different times in response to continuous learning necessitated by a need to control.

The nature of inner speech however is not simply an inner version of social speech. Whilst it still retains elements of social speech by connecting thoughts and words, Vygotsky explains 'in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought' (Vygotsky 1962: 39). So what then is the nature of inner speech? Minick suggests the following:



the phonetic and grammatical abbreviation of inner speech as well as its non-vocalised character emerge in connection with a change in the function of speech from the mediation of social behaviour to the mediation of individual behaviour...the vocalised quality of egocentric [private] speech is a reflection of its inadequate differentiation as a form of *speech for oneself* from communication speech.

(Minick 1987 in Daniels 1996: 39)

He clearly sees the nature and form of inner speech and private speech as distinct in both form and purpose from social speech. In other words, the particular grammar and syntax of inner speech reflect the 'metamorphosis' of communication with others (dialogue with others) into reasoning for oneself (dialogue with self).

Just as Vygotsky argued that an explanatory principle was needed to apply to consciousness, equally he proposed a unit of analysis to link speech and thought. He believed that verbal thought is qualitatively different from its speech and thought derivatives. Thus he chose 'word meaning' as the unit of analysis, because it reflects the characteristics of the communicative activity in which it develops i.e. as an amalgam of thinking and speech brought together through their functional relationship. Vygotsky gave the lucid example of the choice of an appropriate unit of analysis for water. He advocates that this should in fact be the molecule water and not the hydrogen and oxygen atom since it is only through an analysis of the relationship between the atoms that we can discover the characteristics of water that are not to be found in either atom.

Finally then speech inherently contains two processes - transition from external communication to inner dialogue (via private speech) and conversely translation of inner thought to its linguistic communicative form. Social context plays a central role: a role

where social speech encourages the development of private speech; which in turn develops inner speech; which in turn has the potential to become social communication. According to a Vygotskian theoretical perspective, one can conclude that private speech plays a pivotal role in the learning process and that social interaction is the nexus of cognitive and language development.

### Summary

To summarise part I of this chapter, I have selected tenets based on Vygotskian or socio-cultural and cognitive theory, which I feel have resonance with my own thoughts on developing effective learning environments as suggested in the preceding chapters. These are central to the conceptualising a theoretical basis for this study and are presented as follows:

## Constructing effective learning environments

### Element one:

<b>Interaction (incorporating pedagogical moves)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning precedes development. Individual progression is reliant on learning.</li> <li>• Development does not follow learning in a shadow-like way, nor is it linear.</li> <li>• Learning has taken place when understood knowledge becomes internalised into the individual's repertoire as independent knowledge. This charts the path from intermental to intramental activity.</li> <li>• Learning activates a variety of developmental processes which become operational through interaction. <b>Social interaction is the nexus of learning and development.</b></li> <li>• Meaning is socially constructed - it is not through a simple process of transmission that the social becomes the individual because the same individuals must construct their own sense from available meanings.</li> </ul>



*If social interaction links learning development, language, consciousness and self-regulation, then it follows that this should be foregrounded in an educational setting. The important issue to be explored is the nature of classroom interaction which will effectively promote language learning.*

## Element 2:

### **Mediation and Intervention Supporting learning - towards learner 'control'**

- The ZPD is the process which charts the difference between an individual's ability to solve problems alone and to solve them with assistance or collaboration.
- Mediation within the ZPD embodies a crucial educational principle if self-regulation is the aim. Scaffolding can be seen as mediation in the ZPD. It has many forms but usually focusses on **teacher support, interaction with peers and 'other' support in the classroom context**. Scaffolding is a pedagogical issue since it assists the educational process.
- Scaffolding has two progressive stages:
  - Stage one: teacher provides the content and focus for learners to be actively involved in increasing knowledge and skills.
  - Stage two: **gradual transfer of responsibility for initiating learning from the expert to individual i.e. learner takes control.**
- Mediated activities allow lower order skills to be transformed into higher order skills which are currently considered to have high metacognitive value.
- Individual participation is central if the need to continually negotiate and renegotiate meaning is fulfilled i.e. the learner must be actively engaged in activities.

*Mediation isn't just to do with teacher 'intervention'. Therefore scaffolding has particular meaning in this kind of learning context. However, the extent to which scaffolding extends to stage two in current common classroom practice is debatable. A pertinent focus of research would be to explore alternative interpretations of mediated learning (scaffolding) and in particular those strategies which support the extension of learning from stage one to stage two (i.e. towards learner control).*



### Element 3:

#### **Self-regulation strategies for consciousness and control**

- **Consciousness allows individuals to organise their behaviour and take control.**
- Because humans need to control (self-regulate) both their external and internal worlds, tools have developed to assist them. Language is the most powerful of symbolic tools. It therefore follows that the more language there is available the more likely an individual is to self-regulate. **Language therefore plays a crucial and strategic role in self-regulation.**
- **Socially meaningful activity or interaction, is the generator of human consciousness.** Consciousness can be investigated through the study of interaction
- Speech or language serves two functions:
  - Cognitive for intrapersonal self-regulation and ultimate control of the environment i.e. the social voice becomes the inner voice which allows for self-regulation.
  - Social for interpersonal communication.
- Language is used therefore not only to communicate but to trigger cognitive processing
- Private speech is not a transitional stage between social and inner speech. It embodies characteristics unique to **both**. It represents the externalisation of inner order as an individual attempts to gain control of his/her cognitive functioning.
- **Private speech which is closely related to social speech has a strategic function eg it helps problem-solving.**
- Although private speech goes 'underground' and becomes inner speech, it can re-emerge at any time depending on the task. This reinforces its strategic function.
- Inner speech is non-vocalised and has phonetic and grammatical abbreviation. As speech changes its function (e.g. mediation of social behaviour to individual behaviour) it may become vocalised.

*Gaining control involves in part 'conscious' behaviour acquired through social interaction. This suggests that language (social interaction) plays a fundamental role in self-regulation (control). Language therefore can be said therefore to perform a strategic function. For example, if private and inner speech contribute to self-regulation, then a study of private speech may usefully inform us further about this process. If private speech is instrumental in the process, it may well be that the construct could be explored for its strategic 'properties'.*

These three elements - interaction, mediation including intervention and self-regulation or control will be explored further in part 2 of this chapter.

## **Part 2: Exploring theoretical applications within the classroom context**

### **Introduction**

#### **Vygotsky and modern language learning**

As has already been stated in part I of this chapter, Vygotsky's learning theory was centred around the development of and in language as the mother tongue. Indeed there is evidence to show (*Thought and Language* 1962) that he viewed learning a foreign language as a disembedded, taught activity quite separate from language development.

The influence of scientific concepts on the mental development of the child is analogous to the effect of learning a foreign language, a process which is conscious and deliberate from the start.

(op cit: 109)

Vygotsky describes how in foreign language learning the learner is made aware of phonetic, grammatical and syntactic forms before developing spontaneous, fluent speech. He also contends that a learner's strong points in a foreign language are weak points in the natural tongue and vice versa - and illustrated by the child who can conjugate and decline verbs correctly in the mother tongue without realising it, yet can distinguish between genders and grammatical forms in the foreign language. Similarly, a child will articulate the native language unconscious of the sounds and may have problems in spelling and breaking words down, yet in the foreign language this is not necessarily the case. Vygotsky also describes spontaneous foreign language speech as the crowning achievement of 'long arduous study' (ibid.). This reference again suggests that he believed foreign language learning could only be acquired through 'academic' methods



which allow the learner access to knowledge of and about language. In addition, it could be argued that a capability in foreign language facilitates access to the higher forms of the native tongue. Following this line of thinking, it would appear that to be a successful foreign language learner one needs a degree of maturity in the mother tongue in order to transfer those meanings already known to the foreign language system.

The implications of Vygotsky's theoretical stance in *Thought and Language* (1962) are as follows:

- A foreign language should be taught as a decontextualised and disembodied academic 'cognitive' exercise.
- An emphasis on form rather than meaning is required since meaning can be transferred from the mother tongue.
- A learner needs a degree of maturity in the mother tongue before embarking on a second.

This apparent variance of Vygotsky's theory with my own views on modern language learning, needs some exploration. I should like to contest Vygotsky's views on foreign language learning as they relate to current pedagogical theory and practice. Instead I should like to make a case for including the teaching and learning of modern languages within a more general theory focussing on the social basis of learning for the following reasons:



- *Thought and Language* was first published in 1934 in Russian and was not translated into English until 1962. The aims of foreign language teaching and learning more than 60 years ago cannot take account of subsequent cultural developments and shifts in pedagogical thinking. The theory being developed in early Vygotskian classrooms was a theory of development for and in mother tongue language.
- In the past twenty years there has been an overwhelming diminution of those who would support modern language learning as an academic privilege, aimed at the most able with the objective of allowing access to great works of literature. Languages for an ‘academic elite’ has been replaced by the ‘languages for communication’ era and the *Niveau Seuil* (van Ek, Council of Europe: 1975) had come to the fore, promoting accessible language learning for all.
- Levine (1993 in Daniels 1996: 212) argues that it is the interplay between affect and cognition, learning and teaching, which is the true legacy of Vygotsky’s thinking and not an apparent polarisation of first and foreign languages. She points out that Vygotsky’s writings on foreign languages should be read in their original context, where he is at pains to disagree with a correspondent who wished to abandon direct teaching. In response, Vygotsky claimed that by refusing to ‘mediate’ or intervene in the learning process by ‘teaching’, then in turn the process of development would be divorced from that of learning and teaching - a concept unacceptable to Vygotsky. It could be argued therefore that in this sense he used foreign language learning as an example of how conscious

teaching and learning are unitary and yet at the same time must contain multi-directional, development pathways. Given the pervading pedagogy associated with foreign language teaching in the 1930s, then it would seem to be an appropriate illustration.

- If one adapts a social-interactive perspective on current modern language teaching and learning practices, then potentially learner communication, interaction, engagement and self-regulation (control leading towards learner autonomy) are foregrounded. Learning a modern language could arguably be said to share and mirror some of the same aspects of the role of the first language - thereby coming within the scope of Vygotsky's general learning theory. Whilst I am not by any means suggesting that the two are synonymous, the central tenet that language as a mediational tool (linguistic processing) is linked to thought (cognitive processing), and that cognition, language and learning are 'socially situated', could be said to apply to both first and second languages, if one defines 'language' in the broadest sense.

Therefore, given the developments in theoretical and pedagogical thinking since the time of Vygotsky's writing, I feel it is not only justifiable but wholly appropriate to apply Vygotskian theory to foreign language learning contexts. I should now like to relate those aspects of Vygotsky's general theory of learning, as highlighted at the end of part 1 of this chapter, to the issues which have been discussed in chapter 2 in order to relate their application to and implications for this thesis, as well as to demonstrate personal developments in my own thinking and theorising.



## **Exploring interaction**

The current prominence given to classroom interaction has of course significant implications for how teachers perceive their role and their choice of appropriate teaching style i.e. fine-tuning the balance between the mediational role of the teacher alongside the increasingly independent role of the learner. However, as Schinke-Llano (1996) points out, interaction is only part of the picture:

In second language education, we have been told to abandon drills and to focus on the learners, providing them with as many opportunities as possible for interaction....classes are the better for such innovations, there is a sense that we still lack a framework that is consistent, coherent and cohesive enough to encompass all that we know or think we know about the second language acquisition process.

(Schinke-Llano 1996: 31)

Adopting a Vygotskian approach in search of Schinke-Llano's framework, essentially eschews the 'banking' approach to teaching - Freire's analogy (1970). Teachers do not 'deposit' informational currency neither are learners reduced simply to receiving, memorizing and repeating. There is not a disengaged brain. Instead, the classroom is viewed as a social organisation where both teachers and learners engage in dialogic or multi-voiced activities to enable learners to achieve cognitive and linguistic self-regulation. This view is echoed in John-Steiner's study (1985) where she reports how Finnish immigrant children experienced severe difficulties in Swedish schools because they were initially placed in very structured classrooms where there was little chance of meaningful interaction - effectively the teacher did most of the talking! If cognitive development is to do with the interplay between learners' linguistic potential level and



actual level, then **meaningful interaction** is the key. The onus is on the teacher to be attuned to the students' emerging skills and abilities. Findings such as these are particularly relevant to the modern languages context, since the crucial nature of meaningful communication and interaction is emphasised - surely one of the major aims of second language learning!

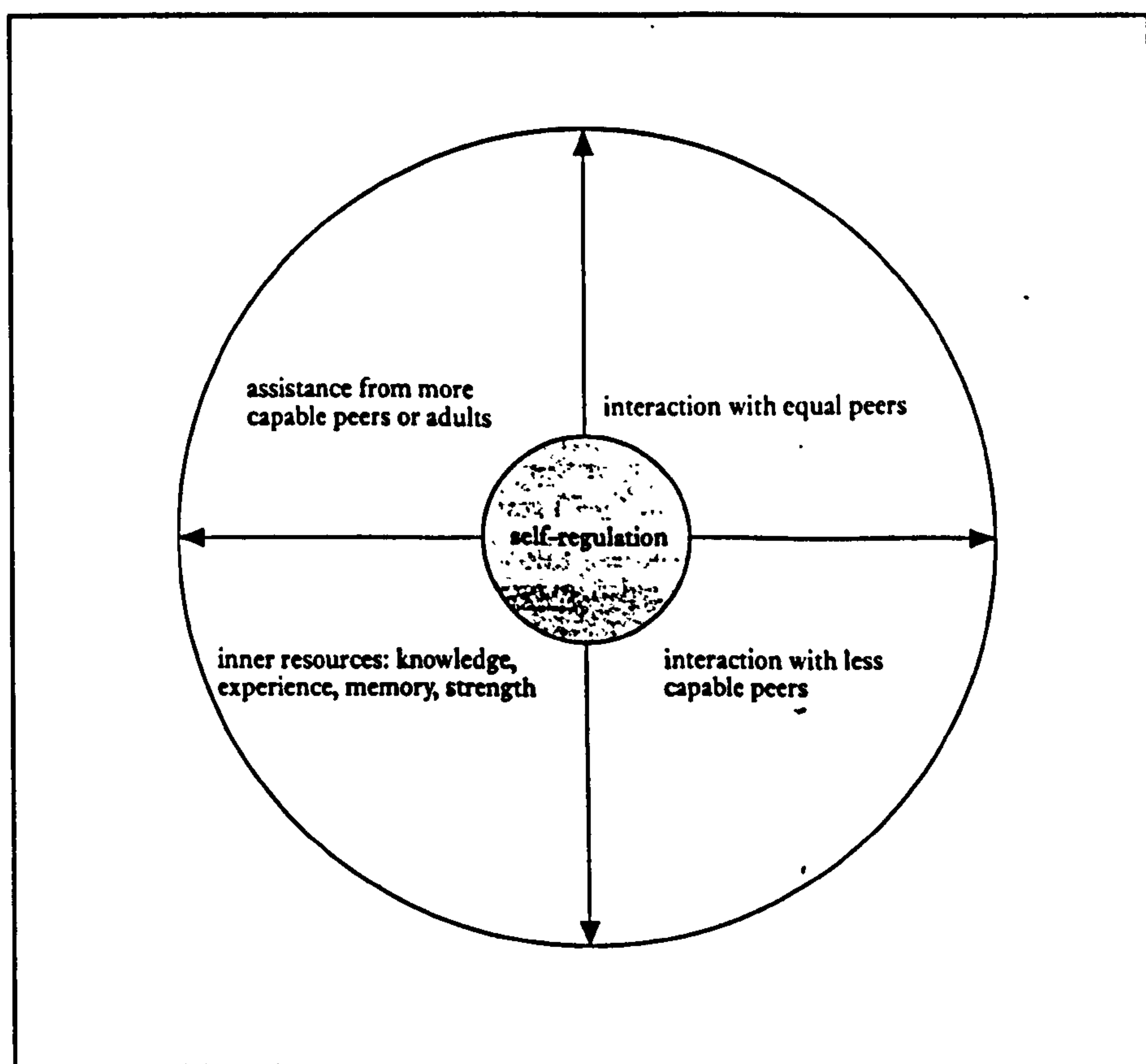
Research in this field indicates that interaction involving two-way communication opens an effective channel for negotiating meaning and ultimately to acquiring the target language (Long 1983, Pica and Doughty 1985, Swain 1985). This approach is supported by the work of Tudge (1990), who also emphasises that it is the **context** in which the interaction occurs which is of crucial importance. Kozulin (1990: 13) also warns that the ZPD is not a single but a very complex notion - process not place - that differs from context to context because 'for each discipline and each student the interacting curves of learning and development need to be plotted individually'.

With an emphasis on social interaction, it is not only the expert who has a role to play in the ZPD. Doise (in Mugny, 1984) reports on his findings which indicate that not only do children working with peers do better in problem-solving exercises than when working alone, but that the improved performance depends more on 'conflict of concentration which the subject experiences during the interaction' (1984: 58). Being presented with alternative ideas, view points, suggestions - whether 'correct' or not - seemed to be the catalyst for individual cognitive restructuring. This mental restructuring allows each partner to adopt an approach more in advance of the previous one. This notion is also supported by research from Ames and Murray (1982), Damon and Killin

(1982) and Roy and Howe (1990).

Thus, collaborative work within the ZPD has a central role to play, especially when individuals are engaged in problem-solving tasks. Vygotsky's strong claim that the intellectual skills children acquire are directly related to how they interact with others in specific problem-solving environments is described by Moll (1990 : 11) as 'learner-in-social-activities'. The implications of Vygotsky's claim is far-reaching and raises some concerns regarding the nature of the curriculum in the modern languages classroom. Is problem-solving perceived by teachers as being either relevant or worthwhile in language classrooms? Is group work essentially collaborative? How does the composition of groups affect learning?

According to van Lier (1996) productive work in the ZPD can be accomplished by providing learners with a 'rich menu of activities' (1996: 193) using a wide variety of resources - not only the teacher- which include assistance from more capable peers or adults, collaboration with equal peers, interaction with less capable peers and inner resources.



(van Lier's multiple zones of proximal development 1996: 194)

In particular van Lier and Matsuo (in van Lier, 1996: 193) propose that interaction amongst learners of apparently equal ability will encourage symmetry and amongst less able peers will encourage a variety of discourse management strategies. In other words, there is not one style of learning within the ZPD, but by adopting an 'ecological' framework there are many options. After all it is the process, the interaction, not the end product which involves the individual in the co-construction of his or her learning environment and the social construction of learning in general. Van Lier also reminds us that for social interaction to become language development then it is dependent on the quality and type of interaction or communication.

This clearly has implications for pair work and group work as well as whole class



teaching within the foreign language context. It also focuses on developing meaning as the 'key barometer' (Moll's term op cit) to movement in the ZPD, where individuals are given opportunities to participate in qualitatively collaborative activities, i.e. 'collaborative use of mediational means to create, obtain and communicate meaning' (Clay & Cazden 1990). Different research has reported on the positive effects of interaction on the development of specific skills such as reading and writing (McLane 1990, McNamee 1990, Moll and Greenburg 1990), whereas Seliger's study (1977) focussed on the learners' willingness to interact i.e. 'low input generators' tended to be dependent on 'forced' classroom interaction whereas 'high input generators' readily tested out their own target language more effectively. From this evidence therefore one might conclude that ultimately the ideal classroom context would be one where learners willingly interact and collaborate. The teacher's challenge is to transform the ideal into the real by planning interactive activities which encourage and facilitate all learners to take control of their own learning.

### **Exploring intervention**

The importance of the quality and nature of mediation or intervention within the context of the ZPD is supported by research studies such as Freund (1990), Heber (1981), Henderson (1984), Rogoff, Ellis and Gardner (1984). They hold a consensual view that young children's learning performance is raised when interacting with supportive 'experts' or adults. However in Freund's 1990 study of Joint Involvement Episodes, those children who received feedback from the adults performed significantly better than those who did not. Such assistance can have many different forms such as explanation, discussion, debate amongst learners, problem-solving support, watching a particular TV

programme and so on. In other words, if the support is appropriate and meaningful, the understanding of the learners can be extended far beyond what they could reach alone.

However, few studies make it possible to establish the exact nature of the role of the 'expert'. In contrast to some research findings, Kontos (1986) found that self-directed problem-solving was as effective as expert intervention - a finding I should like to follow up in my own research. Similarly, Damon & Killin (1982) warn that more work needs to be done to define the context and the type of conditions which facilitate optional interaction, such as the 'one-step-ahead' strategies, described by Heckhausen (1987). Tudge (1992) also found that the effects of pair and group work could be detrimental to learning and did not facilitate learner development per se.

Moreover, it could be argued that whilst Krashen's notion of comprehensible input, i.e. where the teacher feeds in some language which is beyond the current capacity of the learner ( $i+1$ ), goes some way towards mediating in the learning process, it does not inform us about the quality or nature of this input. Bruner's (1983) notion of scaffolding goes some way to clarifying this.

One sets the game, provides a scaffold to assure that the child's ineptitudes can be rescued or rectified by appropriate intervention, and then removes the scaffold part by part as the reciprocal structure can stand on its own.

(Bruner 1983: 195)

Van Lier (1996) develops the notion of scaffolding as being dynamic and containing six basic principles:

- continuity - repeated occurrences containing mixture of repetitions and variations;
- contextual support - safe but challenging environment;
- intersubjectivity - mutual engagement between learners and between teacher and learners (Wells 1985);
- contingency - activities must be open to change, deletion, repetition as determined by participants;
- handover - to allow participants control as soon as possible and lead to self-regulation;
- flow - joint synchronisation of actions which allows for actions to 'flow' in a natural way.

Van Lier adds that these principles might not readily transfer from a child to an adult learning context or academic instruction in general. Whilst he agrees that these constitute a central feature of children's learning, he also makes a case for further studies on ways in which

the power of scaffolding can be brought into the classroom, particularly in the areas of learning in which social interaction clearly plays a central role, such as in language learning.

(op cit: 196)

Moreover, there are relatively few studies of scaffolding in large classes, other than those concentrating on small-group activities (Palinscar & Brown 1984) or one-to-one interactions (Cazden 1988).

An interesting study by Hedegaard (1996) underlines the importance of teacher awareness of appropriate planning in the ZPD, if effective mediation and meaning are to be created.



She describes how social sciences subjects were integrated into ‘the evolution of the species’ with 3rd to 5th grade pupils in Danish elementary schools. A deliberate attempt was made by the teachers in their planning to advance from the general to the concrete, and for the children’s learning to progress from their own preconceived actions to the abstract symbolisation of the knowledge. Additional use of materials which were sensitive to the learners’ ZPD as well as providing for individual differences, resulted in qualitative changes in the learners’ problem-solving capability.

Van Lier (op cit) illustrates how a simple activity based on setting up an overhead projector in an English language class, can be built around pedagogical scaffolding on three levels (macro, micro, interactional). Van Lier demonstrated how the teacher tried to ensure that the activity was neither too difficult nor too easy and that the students were ‘intersubjectively engaged’.

There is of course an underlying assumption that as well as careful planning for mediation during activities, that spontaneous learning episodes will also play an important role. This suggests that if the teacher not only constructs but also co-constructs different learning contexts, then not all the potential learning activities can possibly be planned in advance. ‘Even though it does not show up on lesson plans, this local interactional scaffolding may well be the driving force behind good pedagogy, the hallmark of a good teacher.’ (op cit: 199). This echoes what van Manen (1991) had previously described as ‘pedagogical tact’.

I feel it is appropriate to comment at this juncture that this kind of planning appears absent from modern language classrooms, where problem-solving activities are often regarded

as irrelevant to the subject matter and differentiated activities are unlikely to even acknowledge the ZPD.

Johnstone (1989) in his guide for language teachers *Communicative Interaction* refers to scaffolding as a common foreign language strategy used by teachers and learners, where together they construct an environment where the learner's limited contribution is 'scaffolded' by the 'expert' teacher. In this context, scaffolding is seen as a problem-reducing strategy, which is much narrower in scope than van Lier's version. However, it is the responsibility of the teacher to determine whether his or her intervention is likely to be problem-reducing or problem-creating and whether subsequent interaction will result in meaningful communication. It is guidance from the teacher and negotiation with learners which determines whether learners employ reduction or achievement strategies within a particular interactive episode. Such issues will be revisited in connection with self-regulation strategies.

## **Exploring self-regulation - gaining control**

### **Consciousness**

If consciousness enables individuals to organise their behaviour and take control, then it follows that consciousness is inherent in the learning process. However, to try to define the construct of consciousness is to enter into a fierce debate in second language acquisition circles. To this extent McLaughlin (1990) advises avoidance of the term altogether, dismissing it as an ambiguous umbrella term. Harley (1994) prefers to distinguish between consciousness as control (output) and consciousness as awareness (input). Schmidt (1990) goes further by identifying four elements of consciousness,



namely: intentionality (incidental versus accidental learning); attention (input); awareness (implicit versus explicit knowledge) and control (output which is automatic and fluent). An alternative view comes from Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who believes that consciousness is a self-directed means of organising, controlling and evaluating experiences.

Without wishing to engage in a debate concerning the different definitions of the construct, the constant feature shared by the above definitions is that of self-regulation or control. Whilst van Lier acknowledges that consciousness is a highly complex phenomenon which can not be attached to neat definitions unlike the Principle of Archimedes, he usefully reminds us of Vygotsky's view of consciousness (AILA paper 1996), by reiterating that not only is consciousness intrapersonal or individual but that it also has an interpersonal perspective. That is to say that through conscious participation in interpersonal processes, the learner directs attention and energy where it is most beneficial for learning. Thus it is within the social framework that experiences or activities can be controlled and evaluated. It is this interplay between consciousness as a social as well as a cognitive construct which distinguishes a Vygotskian or a socio-constructivist interpretation from others. 'Without language and without social interaction, it is doubtful that consciousness, in the human organic sense [...] could exist at all' (van Lier 1994: 71). It is perhaps worth noting that an individual may or may not be 'conscious' of these activities of consciousness in the sense of meta-cognition awareness.

Taken simply, van Lier echoes Vygotsky's view of learning as the acquisition of consciousness, which focuses on:



An introduction of consciousness awareness into many domains of activity ie children acquiring control and mastery of psychological processes through the manipulation of tools.

(Cited in Moll 1990: 15)

In Bruner's words (1986: 132) it is a 'loan of consciousness' that gets the learner through the zone of proximal development, where the teacher acts as the learner's 'vicarious consciousness' but gradually through scaffolding hands over responsibility to the individual.

Thus it appears that whilst consciousness is linked to control or self-regulation, and social interaction activates these processes, then the quest for control lies in both the social and personal domain. This suggests that social interaction as a research focus may well shed light on both learner consciousness and control, at the same time being mindful of 'simplistic conclusions' (van Lier 1990).

## **Exploring metacognition and control**

### **Private and inner speech**

I should now like to explore another element implicated in the process of self-regulation.

As was stated earlier in this chapter, the construct of private speech in verbal communication, was first developed by Flavell in 1966 as:

typically defined, in contrast to social speech, as speech addressed to the self (not to others) for the purpose of self-regulation (rather than communication).

(Cited in Diaz 1992: 62)

In other words, private speech has a self-regulatory function i.e . when an individual uses

private speech, it is not to communicate with another person, but to attempt to gain cognitive control of the demands of a given situation.

In Vygotsky's view, since cognitive development proceeds from the social to the individual, then the occurrence of private speech demonstrates individual development, not immaturity as Piaget proposed. Although private speech becomes internalised as inner speech, the crucial point here is that according to the Principle of Continuous Access, it can re-emerge at any time in life during moments of 'cognitive challenge', so that when an individual faces a difficult task, inner speech may become externalised (private speech) in order to help gain control of the task. In terms of developing strategic competence, this suggests that at moments of 'cognitive conflict' (Leat 1998) private speech might emerge to assist the individual in gaining control over a difficult situation. As has already been discussed, there is a link between inner and private speech, yet for the researcher, whilst inner speech may well provide useful insights into cognitive processing, the problem remains that it is not observable. Private speech on the other hand, can be recorded and analysed. As such, private speech is a form of mental action which may provide important clues to the cognitive states of an individual during a specific task.

From this point in the thesis, I shall use the term private speech to refer to the vocalised speech which individuals use when speaking to and for themselves. It operates above the level of consciousness. Inner speech, on the other hand, is non-vocalised, described by Lantolf ( in Lantolf and Appel, 1994:14) as the 'cognitive black-hole', which eventually goes below the level of consciousness.



There is currently a growing body of research, which focuses on the nature and occurrence of private speech by adults during second language learning. Much of this research is based on the notion that both private and inner speech act as a regulating mechanism for the learning of new or difficult concepts, including those of the second language itself. (Sokolov,1972; Appel, 1986; de Guerrero, 1990; Frawley and Lantolf 1984; McCafferty, 1992). If inner speech facilitates and contributes to learning and thinking, then investigating what Sokolov (1972) describes as its vocalised or 'observable' form i.e. private speech, may throw some light on conditions which are conducive to activating this mechanism.

In their 1984 study, Lantolf and Frawley found that the linguistic features of private speech between native speakers and non-native speakers during unfamiliar and difficult tasks shared similarities and noted that as such private speech for all speakers performs a metacognitive function. John-Steiner (1991) demonstrated how adult second language learners resorted to private speech when performing 'difficult' tasks. Cohen (1994) and McCafferty (1994) examined learners' private speech in both first and second language during the processing of complex cognitive problems. In particular, McCafferty found that adult learners, when constructing a narrative to describe a picture story in the target language, displayed large amounts of private speech - much of which had a mediational function as the subjects engaged in the process of self-regulation or control.

Selinker and Douglas (1985) reasonably assume that thinking in the second or foreign language is more likely to occur in a situation over which the learner has control. This raises yet again the importance of learner control (linguistic and metalinguistic) within the



learning context.

These studies suggest therefore that the process of linguistic mediation is an integral part of language learning and problem-solving.

### **Private speech, inner speech and linguistic proficiency**

Dixon (1998) suggests that in language learning contexts, inner speech in the foreign language develops alongside the learner's gradual automaticity in the foreign language. Automaticity simply implies that, due to the surface level of consciousness in the second language, the learner has no longer recourse to the first language. In other words, the second language 'stands by itself'. Moreover, as the learner's initial dependency and scaffolding on the mother tongue drop away, that is when the second language inner speech starts to manifest itself, in the form of vocalised private speech. But at what linguistic level do learners need to function before this is possible? Learners may quickly gain automaticity in simple phrases such as greetings, but it seems more likely that an individual would need to be able to say and create meaningful utterances before meaningful inner speech could develop.

Cohen (1995) maintains that a threshold level is needed before inner speech develops in the target language. The argument becomes circular. In order to develop inner speech, which potentially plays an important role in developing language proficiency, the learner needs to have a certain level of target language competence. What is clear is that the learner has to 'take possession of' the foreign language, whereupon thinking functions at certain stages in both languages and at others in the target language. In the words of one

student, 'I gradually discovered I didn't translate from Spanish to English and back again, but simply was able to hear the Spanish and respond automatically' (extract from Researcher Field Diary). As linguistic competence in the foreign language increases then the occurrence of private speech decreases - as though private speech 'dissolves' into inner speech which then takes over regulating or controlling the learning (Frawley and Lantolf, 1985). Dixon (op cit) also supports this idea, suggesting that foreign language seems to 'scaffold upon itself' once a certain level of proficiency has been reached. Kjellin (1998) contributes to the argument when he proposes that rather than linking inner speech in the foreign language to proficiency levels, it might be more fruitful to explore the idea of inner speech as a learning strategy leading to proficiency. I find this a particularly useful suggestion. In this case, if private speech is related to inner speech, then finding ways of encouraging the use of learner private speech, in the broadest sense, may lead to more effective language learning.

### **Private speech, private speech and metacognition**

Research studies illustrate how individuals engage in a range of vocalised and non-vocalised speech activity during the learning process. For example, Vygotsky (1978) differentiated between inner speech and mental rehearsal. He perceived mental rehearsal as voluntary and intentional, exemplified by non-vocalised dialogues and phrases in which learners engage to consciously and intentionally 'practise' language. Dixon's work (op cit) also led him to conclude that mental rehearsal plays an important cognitive and metacognitive role in the development of a second or foreign language. In addition, Willing (1989) describes how the ludic factor or 'playing' with the new language, with its echoic and mimetic features, contributes to learning.



In my view, it is de Guerrero's work (1994) which makes a significant contribution to the field, by taking a much broader view of inner speech. De Guerrero advocates that inner speech includes both voluntary or intentional (mental rehearsal) and involuntary expressions of internal and non-vocalised speech. In her study into adult Spanish-speaking learners of English, she provided empirical evidence to show that the majority of her learners experienced inner speech in the second language. Her findings also demonstrated that the occurrence of inner speech was related to individuals' rising proficiency, thus defining the former as a developmental phenomenon. In her research, she found that inner speech fulfilled the following roles: a mnemonic aid; self-teaching; self-evaluation; error correction; clarification of thoughts; creation, organisation and experimentation with oral and written texts; creation of imaginary conversations with others and self-talk. Clearly, many of these functions could be described as having metacognitive as well as cognitive qualities, which again supports the view that both inner and private speech in foreign language contexts perform a strategic role.

### **Strategic competence revisited**

Donato and McCormick (1994) pursue the metacognitive argument further by positioning strategic competence firmly within the sociocultural framework. From this perspective, tasks and their contexts are 'situated activities' in a Vygotskian sense, which means that they are dynamic and continually being developed - for them strategic learning does not exist in a hermetically-sealed vacuum, but is continually under construction and reconstruction according to the context. They challenge some of the more widely accepted views about the nature of strategic competence discussed in chapter 2. In particular they question the identification and classification of strategies, the notion of 'teachability' or



'learnability' of strategies and the view that strategies are a by-product of an individual's cognitive style or personality. Instead, they propose that strategies are goal-directed actions which emanate from the dynamic social culture of a learning community. In this model, the classroom is central to an individual's strategic behaviour, since the strategies themselves are generated from the social practice of that learning community.

I should like to explore this alternative perspective on strategic competence and metacognition by relating it to the central theoretical stance of this thesis, and in particular to Activity Theory and mediation. In order to understand basic human psychological functioning, Leont'ev (1981) proposed 'activity' as the unit of analysis, since according to Vygotskian theory, analysis had to take account of factors which extend beyond the individual. Accordingly, activity relates to sociocultural settings, which involve interaction and intersubjectivity. In Tharp and Gallimore's terms (1988: 72) it is 'the who, what, when, where, and why, the small recurrent dramas of everyday life, played on the stage of home, school, community and workplace'.

For Leont'ev, the construct of 'activity' can be described thus: it contains a subject, an object, actions and operations. To achieve an objective (language learning) the learner (the subject) takes actions, which are goal-directed. Operations describe the strategies used to achieve the goals and carry out the action. Activity is constructed by the learners themselves and therefore should not be confused with a task. Donato and McCormick (op cit) cite the example of a student (the subject) learning a foreign language (the object), who wishes to become proficient in deriving meanings from texts (action) and thereby engages in guessing meanings from a series of texts (operation). As the context changes,

so too will the strategy. If in the case of automatic strategy use or 'routine operations' a learner confronts a problem beyond the automatised level, then the strategy may become reactivated at a consciousness level to assist the learner in gaining control.

Donato and McCormick suggest that analysing language learning strategies from a sociocultural perspective can inform current theory and research on language learning strategies, and provide direction for further study. They propose three levels of analysis as follows:

- object-oriented learning activity i.e. why the learners uses a particular strategy;
- goal-directed action i.e. how the learner sets about the task;
- operational composition of the action in context i.e. how the context shapes, automatises or de-automatises strategic actions.

In order to carry out such investigations, there is an interesting underlying assumption that any analysis would have to take place in situ, in the classroom itself, since interaction is the genesis of culturally specific situated activity.

Exploring strategic competence from a Vygotskian perspective, raises another issue. The concept of mediation, or intervention, is central to sociocultural theory and as has already been discussed is a potentially powerful instrument which can bring about 'cognitive change' in an individual. Some of the research studies cited so far in this thesis provide evidence to suggest that when the teacher or others intervene or mediate, the learning process is speeded up along with developments in strategic competence. In other words, one can assume that the teacher's role involves some aspects of 'training' learners to develop strategies. Therein lies a fundamental interpretative dilemma. In some contexts,



learner training consists of externally 'imposed' training planned by the expert for the learner. If, however, as Vygotskian theory suggests, strategy use emerges from a learner's goal-directed activity, then unless this goal-direction coincides with the task of strategic learning (i.e. learner training in the traditional sense) then the success of the mediation is uncertain. In this sense, the teacher's role need to be clarified and redefined as Stone (1989: 38 ) suggests:

From an activity theory perspective, the goal in strategy training, should not be seen solely as training in the use of strategies. Rather it is to encourage the learner in question to adopt a new, more strategic conception of the task in hand. Strategic activity is seen as inherently goal-embedded.

In other words, for mediation to be effective and lead towards self-regulation, it must take place within and grow from the learning context, by enabling the learner to create and reflect upon activities and strategies from within and without. This in essence constitutes a co-constructed learning environment. To take an extreme case, such a learning environment paints a significantly different picture offering an alternative starting point, from the one where the teacher organises input on and practice in effective learning strategies and in doing so risks promoting other- rather than self-regulation.

Researching strategic competence from a Vygotskian perspective therefore opens the door to extending the interpretation prevalent in current research by exploring the nature of **strategic activity** within the classroom. This will be expanded upon in my own research since I propose a fundamental shift in perception from strategic competence, as it relates to the more conventional repertoire of learning strategies, to a more dynamic and interactive construct which stresses the inter- and intramental dimensions of learning.



## **Summary**

Part I of this chapter was summarised by tabulating three key strands of Vygotskian theory associated with the construction of effective learning environments: interaction, intervention and self-regulation. In part II of the chapter, these three strands were explored in greater depth as they relate to research in the field. As well as developing a greater understanding of research findings focussing on interaction and intervention in classrooms, I particularly wanted to build on the discussion around strategic competence, central to Chapter 2, by situating private and inner speech within a strategic framework leading towards self-regulation.

To conclude, this chapter has plotted how my own research focus - the interface between strategic and linguistic competence - might develop from a socio-cultural or socio-cognitive theoretical basis. I would argue that Vygotskian theory has particular relevance to this thesis since it satisfies a dual purpose:

- as a mind-set and basis for exploring L2 development
- as an educational research tool supportive of and sympathetic to my evolving research paradigm

Whilst sustaining the central metaphor of this work, I therefore invite the reader to engage with the interlogue - the 'time-out', the 'entr'act', the 'interlude' or the 'break', which crucially allows players time to reflect strategically upon their game.

## **INTERLOGUE**

### **REFLECTIONS ON DEFINING THE RESEARCH FOCUS**

The first three chapters of this thesis have explored the contextual, conceptual and theoretical frameworks within which potential language games are played. Deconstructing fundamental elements of the rules applied to these games and considering alternative routes for effective learning in general and language learning in particular, has enabled me to define a research focus for exploring contexts where seemingly different games are played with contrasting moves and alternative outcomes.

By exploring the interface between strategic and linguistic competence in alternative contexts and reconstructing the strategies deployed by the players during specific games, I hope to discover why and how alternative rules lead to measurably superior levels of linguistic competence. One means of defining linguistic competence is through national 'norms' measured by published descriptors or criteria as they relate to public language examinations. Defining strategic competence is a much more complex and intricate issue. However, drawing on the work of different researchers and pedagogues leads me towards positioning strategic competence in a sociocognitive setting as follows:

Strategic competence is to do with an individual's capacity to engage in and with social interaction and those fundamentally related processes which empower the learner to gain control of the learning environment. Strategic interaction involves language use of both an inter- and intramental nature for communicative and cognitive purposes including

mediation, task-orientation and self-regulation. If strategic interaction plays a pivotal role in self-regulation (control), it follows that the greater the use of language by an individual, the greater will be the individual's opportunities for learning how to strategically gain control of the learning context. Exposure to and interaction within 'acquisition-rich' classrooms is essential for developmental processes to become activated. As a cognitive player, the learner will need to direct in part or co-construct the learning environment. Since strategic competence in my view depends on internal and external factors, on intra- and intermental forces and shared responsibilities between experts and novices, then at this point in the 'time-out' I am steered towards an approach to research which will be less centred on the individual strategic competence of individual players, but rather on the more collaborative and powerful 'playground' of strategic classrooms, where individuals contribute to yet are dependent on a wide range of tasks and activities and ensuing collective strategic learning.

In summary, Donato (1994) argues persuasively for an approach to classroom learning designed to move more 'players' beyond 'thoughtful consumption' to 'reflective construction' of learning strategies through the processes of language use and language learning. This points the way to exploring language learning in strategic classrooms rather than relating language learning to individual strategic competence.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

# **DEFINING THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

### **Introduction**

The following narrative attempts to document the dynamic and developmental processes which I experienced in formulating a research framework for this thesis. It plots a deepening awareness of different opposing research paradigms and allows me to build a professional identity as a researcher. It addresses both quantitative and qualitative philosophies underpinning approaches to research and considers both ontological and epistemological issues. In this context, I am mindful that the research framework must accommodate socio-cultural and cognitive theoretical interpretations of foreign language learning, reflected in the discussions of preceding chapters. The narrative relates a series of stages which I believe were essential to go through, since the very nature of the thesis demanded a growing realisation of the fundamental importance of 'process' both through and of the research.

### **Stage One**

#### **Initial thoughts**

In the beginning, I had the notion that the findings of an empirical study based on learner linguistic and strategic competence in bilingual or content (subjects taught through the medium of a foreign language) and language classrooms, would provide the kind of 'hard' evidence which could contribute to the critical debate about poor national linguistic standards in the UK. After all, on the macro level, according to scientific

tradition, such data had the potential to be both replicable and nomothetic in nature. By setting up control and experimental groups, it initially seemed feasible to collect scientific data which would elucidate specific aspects of the teaching and learning potential of foreign languages in language and content-based classrooms. However two important issues emerged which changed the orientation of the thesis.

### **Opposing paradigms and multiple realities**

The first was of a philosophical nature, since I had a growing unease about the appropriateness of adopting a scientific approach. In the words of the German historian-philosopher Droysen (1858), the notion of *Verstehen* (understanding) seemed to fit more easily with the complex nature of learner competence in specific social contexts, than *Erklären* (explanation). Whilst one could argue that any explanation contains elements of understanding, according to von Wright (1993):

understanding also has a psychological ring which explanation has not [...] understanding is also connected with intentionality in a way explanation is not.  
(op cit: 12)

Intentionality can be defined as having a semantic dimension and relates more comfortably to an interpretative rather than a scientific approach. Indeed, as Hammersley (1993) purports, the social world - in this case the classroom - needs to be investigated through studying meanings and actions, rather than simple cause and effect. 'The social world ... is a meaningful world where actors constantly construct and reconstruct the realities of their own lives' (op cit: 22). Such a view clearly underlines the tension which exists between researching natural sciences and the social world.

I also had a growing concern that the assumptions and characteristic terms associated with the quantitative paradigm were at odds with research requiring a socially contextualised and process-oriented approach. There was not a 'problem' to be solved in the investigation I wished to conduct, but more a discovery about the nature of social and linguistic interaction within different learning contexts.

Ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and what would constitute evidence, seemed to suggest that an approach which was primarily concerned with the explanation and prediction of observable events, (Kincheloe 1991) and its insistence on *explanation, prediction and proof*, would not fit with my interpretation of Vygotskian theory explored in the previous chapters, focussing on the co-construction of learning contexts. The phenomenological position therefore, which views the individual and his or her world as co-constituted, seemed to be more appropriate. 'In the truest sense, the person is viewed as having no existence apart from the world, and the world as having no existence apart from the person' (Valle and King 1978:18).

The notion of reality and its interpretation seems to me to be well illustrated by a reported anecdote involving Picasso, who was asked during a train journey by a passenger why he didn't paint people the way they really are. When Picasso asked him to explain, the passenger took out a photo of his wife saying 'This is my wife', to which Picasso supposedly commented that she looked rather small and flat! Such a story underlines the crucial principle that interpretations of reality from different perspectives,



give rise to the notion of the plurality of reality or multiple realities. Creswell adds to the argument:

Multiple realities exist in any given situation: the researcher, the individuals being investigated and the reader or audience interpreting a study. The qualitative researcher needs to report faithfully these realities and rely on the voices and interpretations of informants.

(Creswell 1994: 5)

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the scientific or positivist approach views reality as one. By carefully dividing and studying its parts the whole is understood. In such cases, in order to understand the concept of H<sub>2</sub>O as water, it would be necessary to study the constituent parts. However, Vygotsky (1962) cites exactly the same phenomenon from an opposing holistic perspective already discussed in chapter 3, that it is only through the study of water as a 'basic unit' that the whole can be understood. Such an example not only serves to underline the fundamental differences between '*explain*' and '*understand*' but pushes my own orientation in the direction of the qualitative paradigm.

According to Hammersley (1993), the interpretation of reality directly affects the way knowledge is construed and therefore the knower and the known are interdependent i.e. the researcher can not stand objectively apart from the subject of the research. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) take a similar stance when they explore locating educational research into

the context of the local, and particular realities of individual schools and classrooms. For too long the 'black box' of the classroom has gone relatively unexplained.

(op cit: 33)

I therefore support Hammersley's view that social phenomena are distinct in nature from physical phenomena and that the social world should thus be studied 'sensitively' in its natural (classroom) rather than artificial (laboratory) setting.

My initial rather simplistic idea that causal relationships might emerge from the research, had changed or rather 'matured'. Formulating a hypothesis such as *'adolescents' increased linguistic proficiency in content and language learning is dependent on specific factors such as exposure to cognitively demanding contexts and increased use of learning strategies'*, had been overtaken by a desire to understand more about the socially co-constructed interactive contexts which might generate strategic learning and thereby contribute to higher levels of learners' linguistic proficiency. In the words of Newman and Benz:

The qualitative, naturalistic approach is used when observing and interpreting reality with the aim of developing a theory that will explain what was experienced. The quantitative approach is used when one begins with a theory (or a hypothesis) and tests for confirmation or disconfirmation of that hypothesis.  
(Newman and Benz, 1998: 3)

### **Identifying the locus for research: implications of validity issues**

The second more practical issue connected with the nature of the research study arose from the projected data collection process. There are relatively few comprehensive schools in the UK which I could identify as potential data sources, and to conduct the study in an international school in the UK would have been inappropriate. International schools, by definition accommodate a large proportion of foreign nationals, mainly



drawn from a particular social stratum. I wanted to focus my study on UK nationals attending state comprehensive schools. Moreover, to work within the positivist 'formula', using a control and experimental group, I would need to establish a clearly defined set of dependent variables for the study to be scientific and have internal validity.

In the event, it was possible to identify only two state comprehensive schools in the UK where groups of students were studying geography GCSE through the medium of foreign language. Since both classes comprised year 9 learners, initially there seemed to be potential for setting up a control group. However in neither school was it possible to do so, since all other year 9 classes who were taught geography in English were of a lower ability, making comparisons meaningless. As Cohen and Manion (1994) underline:

If in the non-equivalent control group design the means of the groups are substantially different, then the process of matching not only fails to provide the intended equation but in addition insures the occurrence of unwanted regression effects.

(op cit: 169)

Given such a scenario, it would be predictable that the control and experimental groups would differ significantly on post tests independently of the effects of different approaches to geography and modern foreign language teaching. Whilst it is often not possible, due to the very nature of educational research, to undertake 'true' experiments (many studies using scientific methods being in fact 'quasi-experimental') nonetheless, the threats to both internal and external validity of my research would have been insurmountable. On all counts, such a study would not satisfy Nunan's (1992) criteria for validity:



The extent to which one has really observed what one set out to observe (internal validity), and the extent to which one can generalise one's findings from the subjects and situations to other subjects and situations (external validity).

(Nunan 1992: 232)

Increasingly, it was becoming clear to me that it would not be possible to hold many variables constant within the two school contexts. Although both schools are state comprehensive, one is mixed, the other a single sex; in one school the geography teaching is carried out in French, in the other Spanish; the teacher responsible for the geography in one school is a trained geographer who spends the remainder of the week teaching geography in English, whilst in the other, the teacher is a trained linguist who spends the remainder of the week teaching French.

Whilst heeding Nunan's warnings that all researchers must constantly be alive to the potential and actual threats to the validity and reliability of their work, and that all serious research must be rigorous, I concluded that the criteria selected to judge the reliability and validity of a study, depends on the conceptual framework of the research.

In considering the potential for academic rigour in the alternative research paradigm, I found Janesick's (1994) critique of the positivist stance particularly helpful. She coins the phrase 'methodolatry' (methods-idolatry) when referring to the preoccupation with methods of scientific research and questions misguided assumptions that phenomenologists should operate within a positivist framework, when clearly the aims

and outcomes of qualitative research are different but no less rigorous than those in quantitative studies.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) usefully suggest that external validity in a more ethnographic-orientated context, can be likened to Piaget's notion of cognitive processing. Piaget (1952) claimed that in everyday situations, people do not make generalisations in ways similar to those which traditional researchers might use to apply external validity to different contexts. Instead, humans reshape cognitive structures to accommodate unique aspects of what is perceived in new contexts. In other words, it is through knowledge of comparable contexts, that researchers make sense of their similarities and differences (Domoyer 1990, Kincheloe 1991). This analogy for me is an important one, since it extends the interpretation of validity beyond the positivist framework, without adopting 'wholesale' an ethnographic stance.

Where traditional verifiability rests on a rational proof built upon literal intended meaning, a critical qualitative perspective, involves a less certain approach...some would argue that validity may be an inappropriate term as it simply reflects a concern for acceptance within a positivist concept of research rigour.

(Kincheloe and McLaren 1994: 151)

Hammersley (1992) goes as far as to suggest that an 'account is valid or true, if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena it is intended to describe, explain or theorise'(op cit:169). However, such a statement is open to debate in terms of the interpretation of 'accuracy', especially when the phenomena under investigation are themselves unobservable. The study of inner speech is a case in point, which according to Brown is 'a psychological construct [and] is a theoretical label that is given to some



human attribute or ability that cannot be seen or touched because it goes on in the brain' (1988:17). This indeed presented a dilemma. A scientific study in the traditional sense was no longer relevant to my thinking and orientation. As my fascination for and interest in Vygotskian theories and constructs such as inner speech were developing, so too was my awareness of appropriate methodologies in an alternative paradigm. I had reached a watershed.

## **Stage Two**

### **Developing concepts and the nature of research**

Thus it was that my research study began to acquire an alternative focus based on philosophical issues and pragmatic realities directly influencing the nature of the inquiry, which were significantly different from my preliminary hunches.

Events, processes and political dramas do not simply 'speak for themselves'; they are and have to be interpreted; and the framework we bring to the process of interpretation determines what we see ... such a framework should not be thought of as a barrier to understanding; for it is rather integral to understanding.

(Held 1992: 15)

Held's view is in sympathy with a post-modernist stance which regards changes in our social world as requiring an entirely different way of reflecting on existence. Such a view also accepts openly uncertainties about the status of concepts and 'evidence' in social science. According to Held, Lyotard (1984) goes further when he asserts that

scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with another kind of knowledge, which I will call narrative in the interests of simplicity.

(ibid.: 359)



Lyotard's extreme position reflects his relativist stance which holds that it is not possible to compare cultures or social contexts because being locked into our own we only have the capacity to describe other cultures in relation to our own. Embodied in this view is the notion that claims to objectivity and value-neutrality are 'spurious, deceitful and self-cancelling' (ibid: 333).

Giddens (1990) plots a way through the impasse by suggesting that post-modernity is better defined as coming to terms with the consequences of modernity and thereby coming to terms with its intrinsic reflexivity. There is no doubt that this reflexivity must take into account the fact that social researchers are part of the world they are studying, since it is a significant feature of social research. Indeed, there is a sense in which all social research takes the forms of participant observation and therefore involves participating in the social world -as a researcher in a classroom- and reflecting on the outcomes of that participation. With such reflection comes an inevitable reliance on 'common-sense' knowledge or what Bourdieu refers to as 'doxa' (Bourdieu 1990). Quite simply, there is no way to escape from the social world in order to study it.

The dilemma I was facing as a researcher seemed to be that an adherence to the philosophical and political presuppositions associated with either pole of the positivist - post-modern ethnographic continuum was less than satisfactory. Reichardt and Cook argue that in practical terms such polarisation is simplistic and naive and that the distinction becomes blurred as researchers 'in no way follow the principles of a supposed

paradigm without simultaneously assuming methods and values of the alternative paradigms!' (Reichardt and Cook, 1988: 232).

And yet, it was becoming clear that however 'crude', the distinction is nonetheless apparent since the two paradigms are underpinned by quite different conceptions of the nature and status of knowledge. Further investigation in the research literature, revealed a growing group of writers who do not ascribe to either extreme of the research divide. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) reject a narrow definition of science (i.e. deductive and hypothesis testing) preferring instead to describe scientific 'attitude' as being open-minded about method and evidence - thereby not excluding qualitative elements from being seen as 'scientific'. Newman and Benz (1998: xi) advance the notion of science as forming an 'interactive continuum' and suggest that the dichotomy between the paradigms is exaggerated and artificial. Instead they espouse the view that the two philosophies are neither mutually exclusive (i.e. one need not totally commit to either one or the other) nor interchangeable (one cannot merge methodologies with no concern for underlying assumptions) but complementary. Therefore instead of 'rival' representations, they perceive the philosophy of science as a 'continuum' of scientific inquiry, which involves both theory building (qualitative explorations) and theory testing (quantitative measures). In other words, polarisation is to do with appropriateness of methods to address the research in question. I personally find this stance potentially empowering for the researcher.



Grotjahn (1987) in his work, begins by defining the two pure forms of research traditions, using the qualitative and quantitative distinction, then goes on to describe six mixed forms using different combinations of the variables such as the experimental-qualitative-interpretative paradigm. Whilst the idea of combining research approaches is an interesting and ultimately important one, I feel that Grotjahn's 'semantic jostling' in defining different research frameworks is academic and not entirely helpful to my quest for defining an appropriate research framework.

There was also a deepening awareness on my part that in general terms ethnography has a much more powerful contribution to make to research in the social sciences than positivism would allow. Whilst it would be possible to create tests to measure linguistic competence, it was the words of the learners themselves that I also wanted to hear:

using the subjects' words better reflects the postulates of the qualitative paradigm [...] words are the way that most people come to understand their situations. We create our world with words. We explain ourselves with words. We defend and hide ourselves with words.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:18)

Using the players' words as research 'evidence' forces the researcher to address issues of objectivity and subjectivity. Objective has come to mean true, factual and real, whereas subjective has overtones of partially-true and tentative. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest the use of the term 'perspectival' rather than subjective, to refer to the way qualitative researchers view the world. 'Perspectival has the added advantage of being inclusive of differing perspectives, including but not limited to the researcher's perspective' (op cit: 20).



Maykut and Morehouse go on to explain that the goal of qualitative research is to discover patterns which emerge after observation, documentation and analysis. These give rise not to generalisations but **contextual findings**, based on methods of discovery. In qualitative terms then, the genus of the hypothesis lies in observations and the discovery of patterns i.e. the discovery comes before the 'proof' not after it. Add to these principles an approach which is sympathetic to the study of human behaviour in its social context and the direction of my research study was beginning to be confirmed.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) succinctly list a summary of views concerning ethnography as follows:

Ethnography is:

- essentially descriptive, a form of story telling (Walker 1967);
- the development and testing of theory (Glaser and Strauss 1969; Denzin 1978);
- the elicitation of cultural knowledge (Spradley 1980);
- the detailed investigation of patterns of social interaction (Gumperz 1981);
- holistic analysis of societies (Lutz 1981);
- one social research method, drawing on a wide range of sources of information

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1983);

Whilst at one extreme the notion of 'in-dwelling' in the classroom seemed inappropriate to my own study, the prominence afforded to social context and social interaction within this research paradigm, seemed to fit with the nature of the inquiry. At this point in my thinking, I realised that there was flexibility in the interpretation of ethnographic

principles, echoing Hammersley's point that ethnography is but one social research method drawing on a wide range of sources and information. I also concur with van Lier (1988) who believes that all research, whatever its origins, should address issues of validity and cause and effect.

While some of the more radical proponents of ethnography argue that generalizing and looking for causes are not the primary concerns of the ethnographers, these goals are, in the last analysis, clearly shared by all researchers, though the proposed routes by which they can be achieved vary enormously.

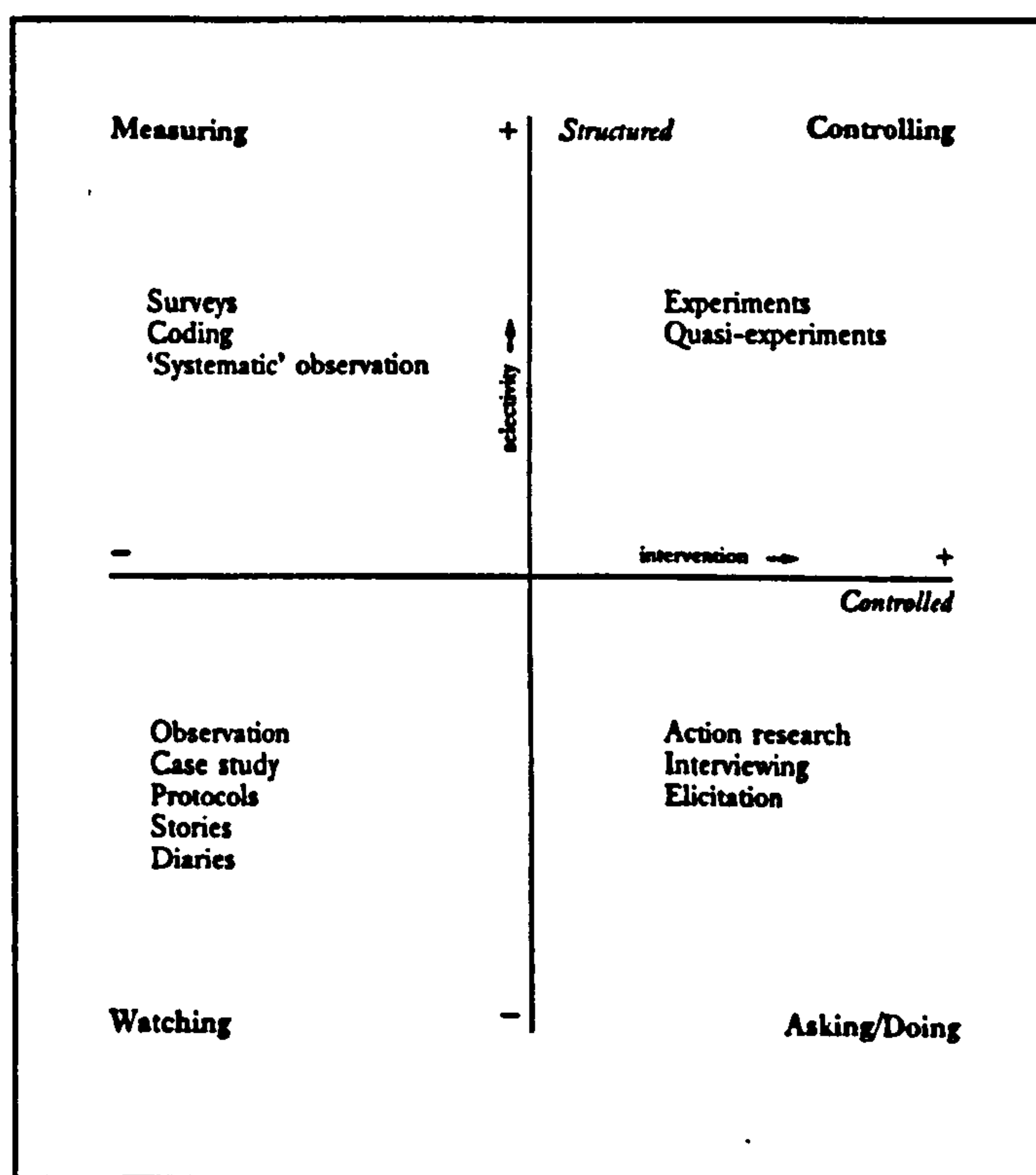
(van Lier op cit: 56)

This points the way towards a more multi-disciplinary study. Van Lier (1988) advocates that research should be 'open' rather than 'closed' in order to maintain a dialogue between two apparently opposing traditions. Ideally, he concurs with Newman and Benz (op cit) when he suggests that experimental and interpretative research are convergent rather than parallel or divergent lines of inquiry. In a similar vein, Denzin (1970) argues that sociologists must move beyond a single method approach, by proposing the concept of triangulation (the use of more than method of data collection within the same study) as a basic principle of social research. He concludes that the greater the triangulation, the greater the confidence in observed findings.

To associate concepts such as openness, flexibility, convergence and triangulation with my own research seemed to fit well. In addition, I was becoming increasingly inspired and influenced by the work of van Lier, not only as a researcher into foreign language discourse but also as a thinker and philosopher. In his 1988 publication, he proposes an

inclusive model for research based on two axes: interventionist and selectivity. The interventionist axis plots degrees of intervention by the researcher, ranging from non-intervention (such as a naturalistic study of classroom interaction) to intervention (involving formal experiments under laboratory conditions). The selectivity axis plots the extent to which the phenomena being researched are pre-defined, ranging from an ethnographic portrait to formal experiments with variables. By intersecting the two axes, four semantic spaces are created:

- the controlling space (high degree of intervention and high degree of selectivity)
- the measuring space (low degree of intervention, high degree of selectivity)
- the asking/doing space (high degree of intervention, low degree of selectivity)
- watching space (low degree of intervention, low degree of selectivity)



(van Lier 1988: 57)



Building on van Lier's model, Nunan advises that in reality, a research study may well transcend its initial space.

An investigation may well begin in the watching space, and then as issues emerge, the focus may become narrower. The researcher may well then decide to establish a formal experiment to test an hypothetical relationship between two or more variables.

(Nunan 1992: 7)

I found Van Lier's 'semantic spaces' a particularly useful guideline into which a more multi-faceted approach to research would fit. The suggested framework also served to highlight important questions which researchers must confront:

*To what extent should I try to specify the phenomena of the study?*

*To what extent should I attempt to isolate and control these phenomena?*

Questions such as these once again focussed my thinking. Whilst I had already defined my research focus, the extent to which it could be isolated and investigated was not quantifiable in terms of a hypothesis tested by empirical methods. Whilst it is clear that there is not one single way to carry out classroom research, according to van Lier, it is both an essential and defining characteristic that the central source of the data in language research derives directly from interaction in the classroom. I had come full circle. Beginning with notions of classroom interaction and the role of linguistic and strategic competence, I had had to find a way through the quantitative and qualitative divide to challenge my basic ontological and epistemological assumptions which I held as a researcher, in order to shape the methodological framework for my study. I was now ready to articulate the research framework.

## **The final stage**

### **Articulating the framework for research**

The research framework provides the 'what' and the 'how' in general terms of the investigation, as well as the means by which evidence is given meaning. Evidence alone has no meaning since meaning is afforded when evidence is interpreted or understood. It is the research framework which orientates the relationship or interrelationships and networks for interpreting and understanding the concepts embedded in the 'evidence'. It provides a particular language or mind-set for describing the features of the phenomena and understanding the data.

Classrooms are complex settings for research. Anderson and Burns point out that:

One of the most significant problems in classroom research is the plethora of concepts having essentially the same denotation. Different language systems aligned with different conceptual frameworks generate different concepts to describe the same phenomenon, making theory development difficult if not impossible.

(Anderson and Burns 1989: 89)

In order to avoid as far as possible Anderson and Burns' concerns, whilst plotting the stages of my personal development as a researcher, I have reflected upon concepts of language, interpretation and understanding inherent in the study I wish to undertake. In making explicit my orientation towards and choice of general theories which underpin the investigation as well as specific interpretations of theories used to give meaning to the phenomena being described and explored, I believe that I had reached the stage of being able to ground my research in a clearly defined research framework.



## **The Case Study**

Building on their previously cited overview of different forms of ethnography, Atkinson and Hammersley usefully summarise the characteristics of social research, which can be grouped under the ethnographic umbrella:

- a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them;
- a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured' data, that is data which has not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories;
- investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail;
- analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most;

(Atkinson and Hammersley 1994: 248)

All four of these characteristics were beginning to crystallise into a tangible framework. Given the limited data source for my research, the nature of the phenomena under investigation and the importance of the learner's voice in the social interaction of the classroom, then a more ethnographic-oriented method of inquiry lay at the heart of my study. The contributory features of the targeted research context suggested that adopting a case study approach would not only be appropriate but desirable. According to Simons (1996), case studies potentially provide an effective method of gaining evidence about the development of curriculum innovation as well as offering multi-faceted evaluation. In a similar vein, I could relate to Bogdan's example of likening case study design to a funnel into which can be poured ideas, notions, phenomena to be studied. In Hitchcock's words:



Case study evolves around the in-depth study of a single case, event, or series of linked cases or events over a defined period of time, the aim being to locate the 'story' of a certain aspect of social behaviour in a particular location and the factors influencing this situation, so that themes, topics or key variables may be isolated and discussed.

(Hitchcock 1992: 214)

However, in adopting a case study approach, I had to address some reservations. Whilst Adelman et al. (1976) defends the use of case studies by arguing that the investigation of a single instance is a legitimate form of inquiry, one must clearly be circumspect regarding issues of reliability and validity. Yin (1994) believes that reliability and validity are as important to case study research as to other forms of research. He advocates that the researcher must address reliability (demonstrating that the study can be replicated) and three aspects of validity - construct validity (establishing correct operational measures for the phenomena being studied), internal validity (proving that the study has investigated what it set out to do) and external validity (the extent to which the 'findings' are generalisable).

I should therefore like to defend the decision to adopt a case study approach. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) talk of re-thinking or re-theorising terms such as reliability, validity and generalisability, as 'tales of the field' exemplified by local, small-scale theories replacing grand narratives. According to Rist (cited in Newman and Benz 1998), qualitative research pursues the validity of its findings through:

personalised, intimate understanding of the social phenomena, stressing *close in* observations to achieve factual, reliable and confirmable data by using an intensive case study of a very small group or some particular individuals. It is the

interpretation of the world through the perspective of subjects that reality, meaning and behaviour are analysed.

(op cit 1998: 119)

Building on this advice, reliability in my own research will come from the openness or explicitness of the procedures and the text - what Huberman and Miles (1994) call 'transparency of method'. This should enable the reader to evaluate various positions presented and thereby encourage studies of replication and adaptation. Whether or not the results will be replicable, will depend on different contexts and their variables and the interaction and relationships of the participants contained within. What is important in this case study, is the clarity of the description of the social context and the methods of data collection, if issues of reliability are to be adequately addressed.

In terms of construct validity, Yin (1994) warns that this is particularly problematic in case study research. This is a challenging issue in my study which centres round operational measures to do with the constructs of strategic competence and strategic learning including specific elements such as private and inner speech - the latter being non-measurable in a scientific sense. Whilst the field of research into private and inner speech from a Vygotskian perspective is still in its infancy, Seliger (1991) dismisses its 'researchability' by claiming that cognitive processing is inaccessible because it operates below the level of consciousness. Although Diaz raises methodological concerns about the inherent difficulties in categorising speech as social or private, he positively urges researchers to

transform the complex issues into a new set of challenges that will be faced with the creation of new and original methods of investigation.

(Diaz 1992: 79)



He suggests that such phenomena can only be approached qualitatively and that quantification of data should be avoided. Studies carried out by Kern (1994), Cohen (1994) and De Guerrero (1994) have all demonstrated that with a full understanding of the circumstances under which the data were obtained, and using an interpretative analysis of a variety of elicitation techniques, then a valuable and reliable source of information about cognitive processes can be obtained.

Pursuing the research framework which I have chosen, in some sense involves taking a risk, particularly according to more traditional 'rules'. Reason and Rowan point out that

there is too much measurement going on [...] orthodox reason produces results which are statistically significant but humanly insignificant: in human inquiry it is much better to be deeply interesting than accurately boring.

(Reason and Rowan 1981: xiv)

In a similar vein, Dam, speaking at the 1998 inaugural symposium of the Centre for Research into Second and Foreign Language Pedagogy, University of Nottingham, encouraged researchers by referring to the comment by MacBeath (1991) that it is time the research community learned to measure what is valuable rather than value what is measurable!

However, when data analysis involves unobservable processes, a researcher is required to make inferences. Inferencing may potentially lead to erroneous or biased conclusions about cause and effect, or about relationships inherent in the data. This problem can be addressed by being explicit about the dialectical relationship between the theory and the data and by ensuring that the design and data collection openly reflect this relationship.



Thus, appropriate measures can be taken to prevent the 'information from becoming meaningless' (Guba and Lincoln's words 1981:115).

In addition, forever mindful of Van Lier's semantic spaces for research, I wished to use a triangulation of methods to support my claims to validity. According to Cohen and Manion, triangulation may be defined as follows:

the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of behaviour. Triangulation techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from one standpoint and, in doing so, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

(Cohen and Manion 1994: 233)

Huberman and Miles (1994) see triangulation itself as a mode of inquiry involving the 'double-checking' of data, using multiple sources and modes of evidence. There are different types of triangulation involving data, theories, investigations and methodologies. For the purposes of this thesis, I shall concentrate on **methodological triangulation**, i.e. using different methods for collecting data. This will be become evident in the research design.

The rationale for this strategy is that flaws of one method are often the strength of another; and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies.

(Denzin 1985: 244)

The question as to whether the findings of a single case study might be generalisable has constituted a major stumbling block to the acceptance of this mode of inquiry in the research field. However, as the qualitative paradigm has gained momentum, it has

with it a change in the conception of generalisability. Guba and Lincoln are frequently quoted on this issue:

It is virtually impossible to imagine any human form of behaviour that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs [...] generalisations are impossible since phenomena are neither time nor context free.

(Guba and Lincoln 1981: 48)

To this Nunan, referring to Adelman's work (1976) adds:

understandings generated by case study are significant in their own right.. Generalisations produced in case studies are no less legitimate when about the instance, rather than the class from which the instance is drawn.

(Nunan 1992: 75)

Hammersley (1993) extends this view of generalisability by proposing that the researcher needs to supply substantial amounts of data about the entity and setting of the case, in order to make informed judgements. If the data are well described and defined, they are open to other researchers as a basis for comparison.

Stake warns, however, that 'damage occurs when the commitment to generalise or create theory runs so strong that the researcher's attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself' (1994: 238).

I intend to address this issue by using one site as the locus of the principal case study and a second site for less extensive data collection. Yin (1994) refers to additional sites as sub-cases embedded in the main case, a notion which lends support to my own study.

To sum up, Yin refers to case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomena in context, and where the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident. Case study inquiry, he claims, copes with technically distinctive situations where there will be many more variables of interest than data points; relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge through triangulation; and benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions, to guide data collection and analysis. All this seemed to make sense, to fit in meaningfully with my developing view of the phenomena to be studied and the context of the research. A case study would enable me to be guided by phenomenological principles where appropriate, use both sites for data collection and design the data collection according to relevant semantic spaces.

Whilst Stake's statement that 'case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of object to be studied' (1994: 236) apparently contradicts Platt's view that case study is 'a logic of design... a strategy to be preferred when circumstances and research problems are appropriate rather than an ideological commitment to be followed whatever the circumstances' (1992: 46). I can identify with both positions.

In the first section of this thesis, I set about justifying from a conceptual, contextual and theoretical basis why the 'object' should be studied, and I have in this chapter presented reasoned arguments as to why a case study is the most appropriate means to that end.



## **CHAPTER FIVE DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

*Events, processes and political dramas do not simply 'speak for themselves'; they are and have to be interpreted; and the framework we bring to the process of interpretation determines what we 'see': what we notice and register as important.*

(Held 1992: 15)

### **Focus of Inquiry**

The focus of the research, as articulated in the interlogue, was to explore the strategic nature of adolescent student learning in contexts which potentially offered abundant language and learning opportunities. Having identified an appropriate research framework (Chapter 4) underpinned by explicit theoretical principles, then the design of the case study had to foreground exploration rather than explanation set within cases which would yield potentially 'rich' data.

In particular, I wanted the research sites to offer not only foreign language classes but also the study of another curriculum subject through the medium of that foreign language. The reason for preferring to select prospective sites which offered a bilingual curriculum was based on an early hypothesis of mine that such environments might provide greater opportunities for exploring the interface between linguistic and strategic competence. Although the orientation of my thesis changed, I still wished to retain this element of investigation. In order to avoid confusion between bilingual classes as defined in this thesis with those in International Schools, an important criterion for selection was that the classes should be situated in state comprehensive

schools.

### **Selection of Cases**

In the event, the cases for study were self-selecting since it was only possible to identify two state comprehensive schools with bilingual classes in the same curricular subject (geography) organised as part of the regular school curriculum. Two classes of year 9 learners (13-14 year olds) were identified. The students were in their third year of foreign language learning (French at one site and Spanish at the other) and had started to study their geography in the foreign language at the beginning of the academic year. Whilst there were many differences between the two sites ( including gender of students, foreign languages used and staff expertise), they also shared many features essentially clustered around an area of common interest: the drive to make bilingual education work. Both schools were open to the idea of a study which would tell, in the words of one of the teachers, 'what really happens-warts an' all, inside our classrooms'!

However, I should at this point clarify for the reader that a condition of access to the sites was based on the focus of the research - i.e. the learners and the learning environment, rather than the teachers. Whilst inevitably learners and teachers are inextricably linked, and the teacher's contribution to creating effective learning environments is central one, any teacher data collected will not form an explicit part of this study.

I decided that one site could become the principal case study (PCS) and the other a secondary or sub-case study (the SEC) for the following reasons:

- geographical distances involved in travelling to and from both sites
- expenses incurred
- ease of access to the sites - PCS easier than the SEC
- foreign language used (my fluency in French was higher than in Spanish)
- commitment to the research was higher in PCS because the bilingual classes had already attracted several 'evaluations' in the SEC

I should however like to clarify the role of the secondary case study. In effect, it was to allow comparison or 'checking' between similar sites in order to add reliability and validity to the principal case - although clearly one has to proceed with some caution in the assumption that the two sites will be similar. After all, a case is to do with social constructions not physical locations. Whilst multi-site case studies can potentially add to the generalisability of the phenomena being explored, due to the time and financial constraints of this particular work, my intention was to use the SEC as a measure for finding similar or dissimilar outcomes for specific elements of the data analysis. Whilst this may go some way towards addressing reliability and validity issues, it principally acts as a catalyst for identifying features of the study worthy of further research.



## **Design of the study**

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), it is important to inform the reader as to whether or not the case study is based on an emergent or non-emergent design. An emergent design is one where an initial focus and sample are selected but refined according to 'emergent patterns' as the data is collected and analysed as an ongoing process. A non-emergent design means that the focus of inquiry is pursued, the data is collected and then analysed.

The reality of my study is less well-ordered. The focus of study was clear at the start of the process, given Hammersley's view that 'the absence of detailed knowledge of a phenomenon or process itself represents a useful starting point for research' (1992:26). Thus, the study had been constructed appropriately, using a non-emergent design with projected data analysis at the end. However, once engaged, the researcher becomes part of that process. Untangling oneself either during or afterwards is at times undesirable, at others impossible. My own personal struggle with tense use whilst writing this thesis is to my mind an excellent illustration of the complex nature of the process - confusion with the selection of present, past or conditional tenses is due in part to belonging to the research process. I should point out that different perceptions as researcher 'emerged' during the study as my understanding of the phenomena deepened. As Campbell states:

The selection of innovative research questions is not a single act or decision. Significant research is a process, an attitude, a way of thinking.

(Campbell 1982:109)

Following on from the notion of tense, Schofield (1993) proposes three useful targets

for case study which address the generalisability of an individual case - **what is, what may be and what could be.**

Techniques for studying **what may be** include seeking out sites in which one can study situations likely to become more commonplace with the passage of time and paying close attention to how such present instances of future practices are likely to differ from their future realisations.

[researcher's note: teaching subjects through the medium of a foreign language is rapidly expanding in many parts of Europe and this may happen in the UK; the focus of language teaching is also likely to have to change if it is to address disaffection and nationally low linguistic standards]

Studying **what could be**, refers to locating situations that we know or expect to be ideal or exceptional on some a priori basis and studying them to see what is actually going on there.

[researcher's note: the case is focussed on two comprehensive schools where curriculum development is at the forefront, where the headteachers and teachers are prepared to take risks by organising innovative teaching programmes- in this instance the teaching of geography through the medium of a foreign language]

**Crucial here is an openness to having one's expectations about the phenomena disconfirmed.**

(Schofield 1993: 109 - my emboldening)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advise researchers studying a case, to include 'provisions for

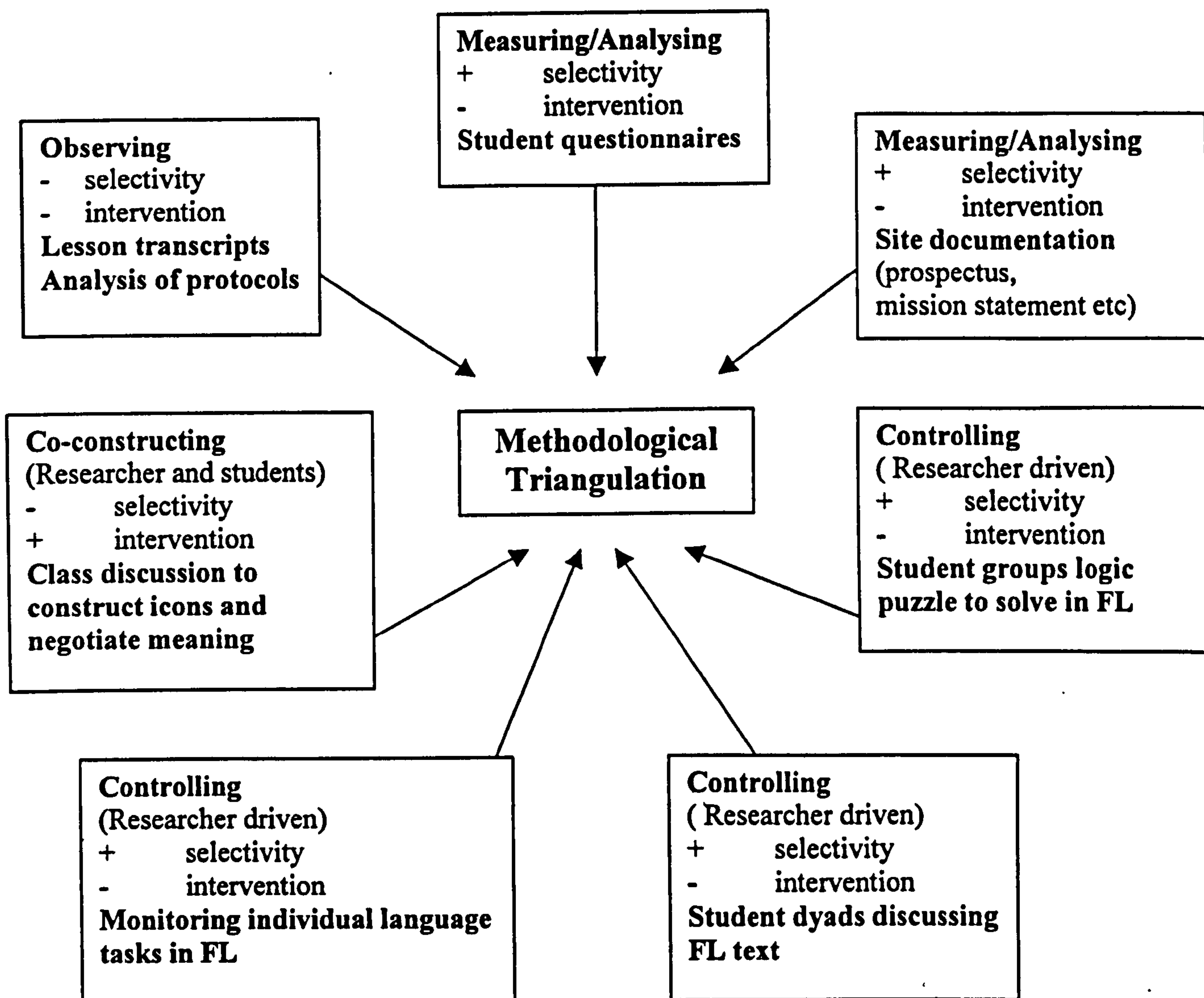
trustworthiness' i.e. the accountability or credibility of the study. One of their recommendations is to use multiple methods of data collection. Whilst having several data sources focussing on the same phenomenon can add credibility to the outcomes, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 232) warn that triangulation is not a simple test and that even if there is some degree of shared outcomes between different data, it may be that combined inferences share elements of invalidity. One should not therefore adopt a naively optimistic view that the aggregation of data from different sources will automatically add up to produce a more complete picture. Whilst heeding Hammersley and Atkinson's misgivings with regard to simplistic expectations of triangulating data, I nonetheless wanted to experiment with different types of data collection methods partly to ensure that triangulation remained an important feature of the research, but also to rise to the challenge emerging from research literature to create new and original methods of investigation (Diaz 1992).

I have tried to address these issues by organising the study in four distinct but interrelated research episodes. Each episode has a different focus, which cumulatively add to a final discussion. During the planning process I considered and selected the following as appropriate: quantitative data, although most will be qualitative in nature; description; reporting; observing; discussing and interviewing within the social context of the classroom, as well as some tasks set up specifically by the researcher to inform the qualitative data. I have plotted the instruments and activities for each episode within each quadrant of van Lier's matrix (1988), to make the processes as explicit as possible. My intention is that this should illustrate how different data collection tools



contribute to the methodological triangulation, which lies at the very core of the research framework.

## Data Triangulation



## **Research Episodes**

I have used the concept of episode since it conveys the idea of parts contributing to a whole but each episode has its own dynamic which interrelates to previous and subsequent episodes. Episode 1 concerns general background information about both sites; Episode 2 explores interpersonal strategic language; Episode 3 investigates intrapersonal strategic language; Episode 4 builds on the cumulation of the other episodes, since it focusses on observing learners in their natural settings, using audio recordings of a series of foreign language and geography lessons.

The following instruments were used:

### **Episode 1:**

**General background information: the settings, the school context**

- extracts from documentation published by each site such as the school prospectus and brochure

**Background information: whole class general and focus group**

- questionnaire (parts 1-4) (French version in Appendix 1)

### **Episode 2:**

- Interpersonal strategic language use
- group activity (logic puzzle to be solved orally and collaboratively)
- dyadic activity (oral co-construction and comprehension of written text, reproduced in Appendix 2)
- individual interviews of focus group

### **Episode 3:**

#### **Intrapersonal strategic language use**

- **class discussion (resulting icons reproduced in Appendix 3)**
- **questionnaire (part 5) (French version in Appendix 1)**
- **individual listening, reading and speaking task, followed by retrospection (listening texts reproduced in Appendix 4)**
- **individual interviews of focus group**

### **Episode 4:**

#### **Observation of classes in natural settings**

- **audio recordings of two language and two geography lessons per site**
- **learner protocols**

**The instruments used in each episode are plotted on the appropriate quadrant of the matrix depending on their relationship to the semantic space. I found this provided me with a useful overview of the triangulation of data collection methods especially in the planning stages of the design of the study. The following diagram illustrates the content of each Research Episode:**



**A matrix for plotting the triangulation of data collection instruments based on van Lier's model of semantic spaces**

+

<b>Measuring</b>	<b>Controlling</b>
<p><i>*documentation E1</i></p> <p><i>* questionnaires E1, E2, E3</i></p> <p>-</p>	<p><i>* group logic puzzle E2</i></p> <p><i>*dyad task E2</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">↔intervention axis +</p>
<b>Watching</b>	<b>Asking/Doing</b>
<p><i>*lesson observations protocols E4</i></p>	<p><i>*individual L,S,R task E3</i></p> <p><i>* class discussion E3</i></p> <p><i>* focus group interviews E2, E3</i></p>

-



**selectivity axis**

[\* E - denotes the Research Episode]

(Adapted from Van Lier 1988)

**Focus groups**

Each site comprised one learning community. One class consisted of 29 learners and the other had 23. Whilst some of the data collected would involve the whole group, I also needed to work closely with a focus group whom I could track in much greater depth. In order to select a representative sample from each class, I used academic

ability as the measure, based on internal test and examination results. I asked one teacher in each school to divide the class into four categories, ranked according to ability. From each band, I selected two names at random to make up focus groups of eight learners in each class. In each site eight students agreed to form the focus group.

The study was carried out during one academic year. I made approximately six visits to each site. Each visit had a different data collection focus depending on the Research Episode. For the purposes of this thesis, the data were not analysed for progression in strategic and linguistic competence over the six visits, although it may be feasible to do so subsequently.

The next four chapters of the thesis will focus on each research episode in detail. Data collection procedures will be documented as follows:

- a description of the instrument and activity or procedures;
- an analysis of the data;
- on-going discussion and reflection highlighting those elements of the episode perceived by the researcher as being significant and contributing to the dynamic of the study.

The final chapter will build on previous discussions and reflection by considering the future implications of this study.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **RESEARCH EPISODE ONE**

- Research Episode:** one (E1)
- Focus of research:** setting the scene, background information using two contrasting voices
- Data source:**
- i published site documentation- the 'official' voice
  - ii questionnaire - the students' voice

#### **Introduction**

The first research episode is positioned in the semantic space of measuring, which encloses methods with a high degree of selection but a low degree of control. I felt it was essential in responding to Guba and Lincoln's (1981) claim that phenomena are not context-free, to supply the reader with 'substantial amounts of data about the entity and setting of the case in order to make informed judgements' (Hammersley 1993). By 'locating the story' (Hitchcock et al 1992) within a detailed contextual picture painted by contrasting 'voices', then in Lincoln's words (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) the scene is set for telling 'tales of the field'. Being mindful of the need to address issues of reliability and validity (here I refer to Yin's advice in Chapter 4), I aimed to provide a detailed foundation on which to build subsequent 'story-telling'. If my first impressions of the site (documented in the prologue) were to be substantiated, then the sites selected were potentially the locus for alternative game playing. In this episode therefore, I wished to provide a contextual setting for each site told from two contrasting perspectives - the 'official' voice, drawn from published site documentation and the players' voice,



reported by means of a student questionnaire. I also felt it essential to contextualise the classes within their larger organisational and social structure at the very start of the study.

## **Part 1: The 'Official' Voice**

Frequently writers are positioned outside yet alongside 'Others'....when 'Others' are not allowed to speak, they remain an 'absent presence without voice'  
(Denzin 1989: 126)

## **The Principal Case Study (PCS)**

I shall refer to this site as PCS. It is a small, 11-16 grant-maintained state, co-educational school of approximately 400 pupils. I have selected extracts from various school documents which paint a broad picture of the school and which enable the reader to begin to understand aspects of the social community at the heart of this study. I have deliberately included extracts in detail since it is vital to this case study that the story is told as it is from different perspectives - the written PCS documentation being one of these. I have also emboldened phrases which I feel carry meaning which is especially relevant to this case.

### **Extracts from PCS brochures, prospectus and other printed documents**

The mission statement for PCS reads as follows:

**At PCS every individual is important. We aim to extend each student's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding; we stress the importance of moral values and creative, recreational enjoyment. We strive to enable our learners to become active participants in the community, to achieve a high degree of independence and adaptability and to become effective, contented and successful members of society.**

(Source: school brochure)

PCS has a 'strong' visionary statement which reads as follows:

**We strive to be the best school of our type in the world. An innovative school providing a distinctive all-round education of uniformly high quality and well-known for the exceptional quality of our foreign languages, international dimension and information technology [...].The success of the school will be ensured through the quality and team work of all its staff and the school's commitment to their continuous professional development.**

(Source: school brochure)

In a publicity leaflet for PCS, the following aspects were highlighted with captions and photographs. I cite:

- listed buildings of exceptional quality;
- excellent sporting opportunities;
- leading edge information technology provision throughout the school;
- **strong international dimension with French/English bilingual section;**
- international standard floodlit all weather pitch;
- superb boarding accommodation in purpose built boarding houses;
- a nationally renowned small farm and rural science department;
- **presentation of European Curriculum award by Tim Boswell, MP.**

(Source: glossy school publicity leaflet)

In the same publication, public acclaim is highlighted:

**PCS is an innovative, award-winning international school, in..., a pleasant commuter town.**

**Our Science and Modern Languages Departments have been described by Ofsted inspectors as *quite exceptional for their quality.***

(Source: glossy school publicity leaflet)

[Note: Ofsted, Office for Standards in Education, is responsible for school inspections and publish reports on their findings which are in the public domain.]

The following extracts are taken from the PCS prospectus, which is in evidence in the entrance hall to the site. Photographs from the publication are also displayed around the school:

PCS enjoys the benefits of the spacious landscaped grounds (over 20 acres) and

buildings of a former teacher training college (1852-1980). Between 1980 and 1994, PCS was one of a number of boarding schools controlled by ... County Council. In 1994 the school became grant-maintained [...] and its doors were opened to day students [...]. Currently the school has 400 students, 200 of whom are boarders [...]. The school is poised for a period of considerable growth and development [i.e. to expand from 400 to 700 places]. There is increasing demand for day places [...] year 7 places are oversubscribed for September.

We are particularly proud of the strength of the international dimension within the school [...]. A substantial number of the permanent staff have international expertise and proficiency in foreign languages. The school has an active network of international links and regular exchanges/visits occur with France, Germany, China, Romania and Poland.

The school's bilingual section (French) attracts considerable interest from the media and from professionals in schools and universities world-wide. At the end of year 8, students currently spend three weeks having all their lessons in French in our sister school near Lyon. In years 9, 10 and 11, the bilingual section study their History and much of their geography in French. Work experience in France is undertaken in Year 10.

(Source: school prospectus)

It is interesting to note that in all PCS publicity and information documents there is a strong sense of pride in achievements, where the international dimension and foreign language learning is given a high profile. The rhetoric focuses on reputation, innovation, international dimension, expansion and quality (e.g. the best in the world!).

In terms of statistical information statutorily available under the Education Act 1988, for the year of the case study, this can be represented as follows:

Number of day pupils on roll-	131
Percentage of pupil sessions (half days) missed through authorised absence-	3.0%
Percentage of pupil sessions(half days) missed through unauthorised absence-	0.1%



**PAGE  
MISSING  
IN  
ORIGINAL**

bilingual section.

These are:

1. **Total undertaking of class to communicate solely in French during the lesson although vocabulary will be noted in both languages.**
2. **Regular testing of vocabulary- without reading out the English word (Year 7 onwards), testing of verbs (from Year 8) and texts (also from Year 8). Other grammar points gradually introduced in context and with notes in the grammar book.**
3. **Enthusiasm maintained through competitive work in teams.**
4. **Vocabulary help sheets given out for history and geography lessons. ‘Surgery’ classes held after school to help pupils who have encountered difficulties. If need be, English is used to explain.**
5. **Attempt to create a French ambiance - decoration of classroom and corridors with posters and good examples of bilingual work; use of authentic French exercise books and French paper [noted for its squares]; French textbooks used for bilingual humanities work; Cahiers de Textes [a kind of planner used in French schools] used for bilingual exchange.**
6. **Bilingual library set up to encourage private reading.**
7. **Speakers and visitors brought in and class encouraged to participate in Open Day playlets, assemblies and presentations to parents.**
8. **French Club set up for the whole school but predominantly supported and run by bilingual group.**

(Source: presentation made by bilingual teacher at INSET event)

All of these features were in evidence during my many visits to PCS, which demonstrates that behind the publicity lies a genuine and professional approach, based on clearly articulated guiding principles, dedicated to making this *modus operandi* succeed if at all possible. The wall displays are a prominent feature in the PCS bilingual section corridors and rooms, the classrooms appear to be lively, interactive and busy places, and the attention to detail, such as the use of French exercise books by the pupils, contributes to the particular ethos of this social context.

## **The Bilingual Class**

The bilingual group at PCS consisted of 30 pupils (one left PCS at the start of the study). In effect, the 'high ability' stream is comprised of those learners in the upper half of the year's intake, with the remainder of the year in a class of approximately 30 pupils. The pupils in the bilingual group, had three geography lessons, four history lessons and four French lessons per fortnight each lasting one hour. This means that in an average week, pupils were exposed to French for between five and six hours. There were 17 females and 13 males in the group. Half of the pupils in the group were boarders, mainly, but not exclusively, because their parents were temporarily abroad or due to particular family circumstances.

## **The Teachers**

Their French teacher, a UK national and a trained linguist with subsidiary history, also taught the group for history. There were two geography teachers. A French native speaker and trained linguist, who taught the group for approximately two lessons per week in French, then spent the remainder of the week teaching French; and UK national who taught the group in English for one lesson per week and taught geography in English throughout the rest of the week.

## **Access**

It is also worthy of note, that I was openly welcomed as an observer into the school, and as a professional researcher into the bilingual section. I was given unlimited access. My presence was viewed as a good opportunity for the school, eager to engage in professional evaluation of their work. I was seen as someone who could make a useful



contribution to the ongoing discussion about the effectiveness of bilingual section - how it 'really' was. At this point, I was excited at the prospect of working in a context where my perspective of reality, along with that of the learners and teachers was valued.

## **Summary**

The documents paint a very positive picture of PCS. Photographs and descriptions of the site portray its physical attractiveness - listed buildings of exceptional quality, 20 acres of spacious landscaped grounds. The reader is also given the impression through the 'official' rhetoric that the school is led by a Senior Management Team (SMT) which demonstrates:

- **determination** - 'best school', award-winning, sought-after, exceptional quality;
- **commitment** - growth and development;
- **openness** - international, world-wide, importance afforded to foreign language learning;  
effective curriculum planning and innovation;  
- bilingual section, leading edge ICT;

[Information and Communication Technology]

but in return has high expectations of its learners e.g. total undertaking of bilingual class to communicate in French. In fact, the bilingual group spend the equivalent of one school day per week exposed to French, incorporating modern languages, history and geography lessons.

## **The Secondary Case Study ( the SEC)**

The SEC is a voluntary-aided endowed state comprehensive school for 11-16 year boys. There were approximately 640 boys on roll at the start of the study. There is a joint co-educational sixth form of nearly 1000 students feeding from a consortium of schools on adjacent sites.

### **Extracts from the SEC prospectus and other printed document**

The following extracts have been selected with the purpose of giving some insights into the site as a locus for secondary case study data collection.

The mission statement for the SEC reads as follows:

**Today, we believe that the education of each pupil is of equal importance, and the potential, interests and needs of each pupil are given full attention. The School seeks to create an environment where order and high educational achievement thrive. It tries to develop clear-thinking, healthy, responsible young people, able to understand, succeed in and contribute to the world and its peoples, in which and among whom they will lead their lives.**

**We think that a child needs two things especially: the sense of security which gives confidence, and the challenge to stretch his capabilities as he grows.**

**Key Stage Three - All pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum [a National Curriculum statement] which includes mathematics, English, the sciences, French or Spanish, music, art, PE, Design and Technology, Information Technology, history, geography and religion. In year 9, some pupils opt to take up a second foreign language (German) [...]. Key Stage Four - These are normally the two years of the GCSE course, although some GCSEs may be completed at the end of year 10 [...]. Some pupils take additional subjects in 'twilight' time...all of these courses provide a basis for progression on to Sixth Form work, and the school takes pride in the fact that pupils at all levels have established an excellent record of examination success.**

**The School has an international journeying tradition. Each year there are extended visits to France and Spain primarily for those in years 8 to 10; [...] skiing courses in the Alps are arranged for pupils of all ages. Some students even do work experience abroad.**

(Source: school prospectus)

Whilst the SEC prospectus highlights sport, music and drama, residential work and school travel, there is no special mention of either the bilingual geography or the role of modern languages within the SEC. There is a less overt international thread than at PCS.

In the concluding comments, the Headteacher states:

**All sorts of students come to the SEC, from all sorts of backgrounds and cultures. For all of them we want to provide an education that sets no limits on what they can achieve; that encourages everyone to improve on what they have done before; that promotes confidence, concern for others, and a sense of purpose [...]. A prospectus with a few words and pictures can only give a glimpse of school life.**

(Source: school prospectus)

In Ofsted terms, the SEC is described as an 'inner city fringe comprehensive' with 36% of the boys eligible for free school meals. Statistical information available for the year of the case study is as follows:

Number of day pupils on roll-	634
Percentage of pupil sessions (half days) missed through authorised absence-	7.9%
Percentage of pupil sessions (half days) missed through unauthorised absence-	1.9%

With no mention of a bilingual section and without prominence afforded to modern languages within the school, the documentation is very different in style and content to that of the PCS prospectus. The SEC documentation is more factual and uses less emotive language. There is a real sense in valuing order, security, challenge at all levels and examination success as well as higher education achievements. The fact remains however, that it is an oversubscribed school with an upward trend in high grade GCSE results.



## **The Bilingual Section at the SEC**

Firstly, it is important to register that the SEC has been involved in bilingual education for a longer period than PCS. As a school where Spanish was joint first foreign language with French (i.e. the year cohort of 120 boys was divided equally, so that 60 boys learned Spanish from Year 7), the SEC had been invited to join a project supported by the Education Department at the Spanish Embassy and the then DFE in 1990, to 'explore the use of Spanish as a medium for instruction and thereby improve student motivation and achievement in languages' (source: school documentation). The SEC won a Curriculum Award in 1990 from the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges and the Spanish Embassy supported the project by providing a Spanish Humanities teacher.

Secondly, during the past five years, the SEC bilingual section has had to address two serious problems. Firstly, the Spanish teachers supplied under the agreement of the project by the Embassy, were unable to adjust to the English education system. Secondly, the Examinations Board rescinded a previous agreement after one year, to provide a geography GCSE in Spanish. The former problem was overcome by a Spanish-speaking geography teacher, already a member of staff, taking over. The Examinations Board's decision, however, has led to a long campaign by teachers, parents and governors, which continued during the study, but to no avail.

**We are concerned that our project, set up and supported under the joint initiative of the English and Spanish governments [...] should be inhibited just when it is about to prove its tangible worth in terms of exam results. Sections Bilingues have been attempted in the UK in a number of centres over the past twenty years. Ours has the very basis for a successful future and would be capable of replication in very many comprehensive schools [...] we provide choice,**

**diversity and differentiation at KS3 and 4. We are pioneering this development at a time when other European countries are moving much more rapidly than the UK.**

(Source: extract from letter sent by Headteacher to Examinations Board)

The disappointment felt by the school is almost tangible. In the early stages, a visiting HMI (inspector) commented that the SEC was 'a feasible though not favoured environment. If a project like this works here, then it will stand every chance of being replicated in other state schools.'

And work it did! Within the first cohort of boys who took the Spanish GCSE one year early, two gained grade A\*, nine gained grade A and 1 gained C grade.

At the time of the study, the only option left for pupils studying their geography through Spanish, was to switch to English in preparation for the GCSE. The enthusiasm and drive is still there, the benefits are made clear to all concerned by the Headteacher and the Senior Management Team, but the future of bilingual geography lies in the balance.

In the words of the geography teacher, when describing the effects of bilingual learning on the pupils:

*We insist that there are very few people in the country who do this, who have something in their Record of Achievement at the end of their schooldays that is different and of an academic nature. It is something which is very important for them to talk about when they go for job interviews or university interviews as being something different which they have done...*

(Source: taped interview with teacher)

## **The Bilingual Class**

There are 23 boys in the year 9 bilingual class. They are the most able boys from half of

the year's intake i.e. the half which have studied Spanish since Year 7. [This in fact is a very similar number to PCS]. They have two lessons of Spanish ( 2 x 45 minutes) and two lessons of geography (2 x 45 minutes) per week, which means that during an average week they are exposed to three hours of Spanish. This is the equivalent of half a day per week exposure to Spanish, compared to one day per week immersion at PCS.

## **The Teachers**

At the time of the research, geography is taught by a UK Spanish-speaking geography teacher, who spends the remainder of the week teaching geography in English; Spanish is taught by a trained linguist, also a native speaker, who teaches Spanish at the SEC.

## **Access**

I was given unlimited access to the geography and Spanish classes, although much of the negotiation was carried out with the geography teacher. I did observe some Spanish classes, but this was in conjunction with the bilingual stream rather than the Modern Languages Department.

## **Summary**

Careful reading of the documentation sets the bilingual group at the SEC against a rather different backdrop to PCS. The rhetoric is simple and straightforward. In essence, the documentation suggests an establishment wishing to present a 'solid' factual account of the school, whilst making explicit its value system based on individual security, growth, confidence, success and a sense of purpose.



However, phrases such as 'inner city fringe' have a somewhat different overtone to the landscaped suburban boarding school. Whilst at the SEC 'some students even do work experience abroad', the PCS expect their entire Year 8 bilingual class to spend three weeks in France. I must also point out, that much of the success of the bilingual section at the SEC lies in more 'couched' terms, which is understandable given the problems the school has had to face. There is mention of some GCSEs being taken one year early (e.g. Spanish GCSE) and some additional work being done in twilight sessions (e.g. bilingual geography classes sometimes start at 8 am or after school - which requires commitment from the learners). The bilingual section at the SEC has won awards, has had national media coverage and has been the object of several national and regional studies. Its position however is somewhat different from PCS, in that the school feels 'let down' by the Examinations Board.

Having thus presented the reader with the 'official' voice, the public image, the messages underlying the 'marketing' gloss, I shall now turn to the voice of the students, the players, the key members of the discourse community as they presented themselves through a questionnaire.

## **Part 2: The Players' voice**

*It is the interpretation of the world through the perspective of subjects that reality, meaning and behaviour are analysed.*

(Rist in Newman and Benz 1998: 119)

### **General introduction to the questionnaire**

In order now to obtain background information from the learners' perspective, a questionnaire was devised to be administered to all participants in the bilingual classes at both sites. There were 29 respondents at PCS and 23 at the SEC.

The questionnaire was divided into five parts. The fifth part was separate from the other four parts since it belonged to a different Research Episode (E2). Consequently, Part 5 was administered on a different occasion (for further information see chapter 8). In the current Research Episode, I shall refer exclusively to the first four parts of the questionnaire.

Each of the four parts had a different focus:

- Part 1**        general background information in which individuals were asked to situate themselves and their foreign language learning;
- Part 2**        individual perceptions of language learning and geography in terms of affect (opinions/attitudes) and skills/activities in geography lessons (abbreviated as Geo/Fr or Geo/Sp);
- Part 3**        more in-depth information about issues raised in Part 2;
- Part 4**        a focus on learning strategies and in particular the more 'traditional' inventory style approach, to quantify and analyse the strategies.





**French?**

**Yes  No**

- **open Followed by an open question**

**If you answered yes, can you give some examples?**

**In the scaled questions, the decision to use a four-point response category rather than the more usual Likert Scale (five-points or more) was a deliberate one, for the following reasons:**

- **the Pilot Study had revealed that certain students had tended to ‘over-use’ the ‘don’t know’ category, as an ‘easy’ option. During subsequent interviews, it became apparent that those same students did have views, and responded well to probes. This concurs with Oppenheim’s (1996) view that ‘scores in the middle region could be due to a lukewarm response, lack of knowledge or lack of attitude in the respondent.’ As Verma and Mallick (1999) contend:**

**Although some the flexibility of response is often desirable, the researcher may want to force a positive agreement or disagreement from the respondent. This can be the only option if, for example, [...] the researcher suspects that a high proportion of the respondents would tick the uncertain box.**

**(Verma and Mallick 1999: 119)**

**Whilst one could argue that being uncertain is a perfectly legitimate response and could be of value to a study with one set of objectives, a different study with a different set of objectives may demand an alternative route to data collection.**

- **The questionnaire would be one of several tools used for data collection. Whilst**

it had a role to play within the methodological triangulation, the data which it yielded could be cross-referenced through interviews and discussions if need be.

- As has already been described previously, a variety of response categories was incorporated into the questionnaire design - the four-point response scale being only one of these.

## **Piloting**

I had already piloted some items used in Parts 1 - 4 in a local school. A research study I had carried out with year 8 learners of Science, studying a one-term module in French, had also been used to pilot and monitor a simple questionnaire. From the initial piloting, the following categories had emerged:

- **attitudes (affect)** items included level of interest, feeling 'special' due to the bilingual project, what they liked most and what they liked least;
- **skills and activities** items focussed on speaking, listening, reading and writing skills as well as different science activities;
- **strategies** items explored dealing with new words, dictionary use, translation issues as well as breakdown in understanding.

All relevant items used in the questionnaire (approximately 10, but at least 5 were open questions) were modified in the light of the initial pilot. Alterations were due essentially to unclear wording, negative saliency, over-use of the 'don't know' category, vagueness of open questions and lay-out in the pilot questionnaire. For a full report of the pilot

study see Coyle (1994) in *Triangle*.

Part 4 of the questionnaire was cross-referenced to the published SILL questionnaire, version 7.0 (Oxford 1990). SILL is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning by Oxford, which according to Brown (1994) is 'the best and most comprehensive of such instruments [strategy inventories]' (1994: 202). An earlier version of the SILL had been extensively studied from a psychometric viewpoint, with internal consistency reliability, using Cronbach's alpha, calculated at 0.96 for a 1200 person sample ( Nyikos and Oxford 1987). In addition, the SILL content validity is high - 0.95, based on classificatory agreement between two independent raters. The SILL items were based on Oxford's own strategy system, and additional items were adapted from earlier surveys and strategy lists by Rubin (1987) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990). However, I must point out that the SILL was designed principally for adult learners of English as a foreign language, to be used for developing learner awareness - a kind of self-check list approach.

In designing the SILL, Oxford's classifications for both direct and indirect learning strategies (see Chapter 2 part 2) fall into 6 distinct categories:

- **memory strategies A** direct strategy
- **using mental processes B** direct strategy
- **compensatory strategies C** direct strategy
- **organising and evaluating learning D** indirect strategy
- **managing emotions E** indirect strategy
- **learning with others F** indirect strategy



Those which are emboldened, relate to my own classifications.

The letters A- F on the SILL questionnaire divide the document into 6 sections according to the different strategy classifications. Given that the aims of my questionnaire were different to those of Oxford's, as was my target group, I decided to focus on two major categories, with sub-sections. These are as follows:

- **making sense by seeking and using solutions (strategies)**

- A understanding

- B using guessing strategies

- C reacting to breakdowns in understanding/the *what now* approach

- D strategies to use when speaking

- F coping with new words

- **awareness of organising and evaluating learning**

- E out of class strategies

- G assessing progress (linguistic and content progression)

My questionnaire was aimed at classes of 13 year-old learners, not adults, and therefore it was essential that the sub-categories were meaningful to the respondents' own learning context. The letters A-G therefore, refer to my own lettering which divides Part 4 of the questionnaire into seven sub-sections. Whilst my two categories partially correspond to four of Oxford's categories, a fifth Oxford strategy type - managing emotions - (Oxford's category E) was not relevant to my study. In all, 27 of the 62 items which I used in Part 4, can be cross-referenced to the SILL i.e. approximately 44% of the items.

<b>Cross-reference of questionnaire items to Oxford's SILL</b>		
<b>Sub-section</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>SILL</b>
understanding	A3	B12
using guessing strategies	B1-9	C24
	B2	C19
	B9	A1
reactions to breakdown in	C12	F45
comprehension: <i>what now?</i>	C13	B22
strategies for speaking	D1i, D1v	B13,C26,C29
	D4, D5, D8	F47
dealing with new words	F3,	A2
	F4	B10
	F6	A3
out-of-class strategies	E4, E5, E7	A8
	F8,F9	A8
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>

Example: F6 (Coyle) cross-referenced to A4 (Oxford)

F6 I create a mental picture (to learn new words)

A4 I remember a new English word, by making a mental picture

I used the SILL in order to incorporate items into my questionnaire which were already 'tried and tested.' I also needed to gain an initial overview, as quickly as possible, of how the learners in the bilingual classes reported their learning strategies.

### **Data analysis**

For the closed items on the questionnaire, 2 types of statistical procedures were used:

1. Descriptive statistics: frequencies, percentages, the mean and standard deviation were calculated, with the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile and above used as a measure of

concordance

2. Comparative statistics: Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine if there were significant differences between PCS and the SEC. Significant levels were set at  $p < .05$

For the free form answers or open questions, an emergent categorisation procedure was used. I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) system of writing individual responses on cards, then placing together cards which have a 'look-alike' or 'feel-alike' quality. This enabled patterns to develop and a coding system to emerge, rather than having pre-determined categories in place before the analysis. Once this process was completed, an inter-reliability check was carried out to measure the agreement of categorisation. The reliability coefficient was calculated using a random selection of questionnaires from each group (4, 7, 15, 19) which had been ordered alphabetically then numbered. This meant that 8 questionnaires out of the total 48 were classified by an independent coder, for Part 1 items 7, 9 and 10, and the whole of Part 3, items 1-5. The coefficient was calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{number of agreements} & \div & 110 \\ \text{number of agreements} + \text{disagreements} & & 110 + 4 = 114 \\ & & 110 \div 114 = 96\% \end{aligned}$$

The independent coder, using my classification system, disagreed on 4 items out of 110.

This gives a rating of 96%.

The closed questions asked respondents to select an answer which corresponded the most to their own thoughts or views. In most instances, the items used a four-category



distribution on an disagreement/agreement scale, using strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. Because the questionnaire was to be used principally for a global overview, then it seemed appropriate to collapse strongly agree and agree to form one positive classification (+) and disagree and strongly disagree to form one negative classification (-). Since the respondents could be identified, this would allow a scrutiny of those questionnaires of the individuals in the focus groups if needed.

## **Procedure**

The questionnaire was administered to the class at PCS (n=29) and at the SEC (n=23). The learners were allocated up to one lesson to complete the questionnaire at PCS (one hour) and two lessons at the SEC (one hour ten minutes). In the event, all respondents completed their questionnaire well within the time limit. The respondents were given the opportunity to remain anonymous if they wished. No-one took this option. In order to introduce the questionnaire, I made the following statement, more or less verbatim:

*As you know, you have been selected to be a part of a national project\* to find out more about the effects of your bilingual classes and how this might help you or hinder you in your learning of French/Spanish. The results of the project will be used to help your teachers and schools make the best possible use of bilingual education and modern language classes.*

*To start the project, I am asking you to fill in the questionnaire as honestly as you can. There are no right and wrong answers. Neither am I personally wanting you to write answers which do not really match what you think, just to please (or otherwise!) either your teachers or myself. No-one will read the questionnaires except myself and when they are read, your names will not be visible to the analyst. There will be other learners in similar classes to this one and in similar schools, who will also be filling in the same questionnaire. [Distribute questionnaires]*

*The questionnaire is in four parts. Let's look at the first part. [Turn to Part 1]. This part asks you to some provide background information about yourself as a learner in the bilingual section, learning geography through the medium of French/Spanish. The second part [Turn to Part 2] is to do with what you think*

*about your work, how you feel you are progressing and the kinds of activities you do. Part 3 simply asks for a bit more information about this. [Turn to Part 3]. The final part - Part 4- is the longest part. This is about how you learn. It asks you to think about the kind of strategies you might use or things you might do in class or at home which help you understand and take part in lessons. [Turn to Part 4]. Now, read the instructions very carefully.*

*Are there any questions?*

*You have this lesson to fill in your answers, so you will have plenty of time. Start when you are ready.*

(Researcher's instructions)

\* It had been agreed by the teachers and myself that the learners should know that they were part of a 'project'. By making this explicit, it was envisaged that over an extended period of time the pupils would get used to my presence and would accept me as a researcher working with them in their classrooms. It was also hoped that eventually, pupils would behave as 'naturally' as possible in the researcher's presence. It was for this reason that the questionnaire was not administered until after I had made two visits to each site. This enabled me to carry out general observations which I wrote up in a Field Diary, set up the focus groups and discuss the timing and research activities with the teachers involved.

## **PCS: Questionnaire presentation and analysis**

**Part 1: General background information to situate individuals and their foreign language learning context**

### **Presentation**

Responses to two preliminary questions on the front of the questionnaire were as follows:

- *Have you ever been to a French-speaking country?*

Only 2 out of the 29 learners had not. However, both pupils were relative newcomers to the school and had not taken part in the school exchange at the end

of year 8.

- *Do you know any native speakers of French?* There are in fact several native speakers who are members of the school staff. All pupils 'know' them.

<b>Part One: Background Information on Attitudes to and Perceptions of Modern Language Learning and Geography</b>					
item	function or purpose	positive +%	negative -%	mean	percentile *
1	school subjects - like MFL	100	0	3.7	X
2	school subjects - like geography	67	33	2.9	
3	MFL use outside class - speak	79	21	3.0	X
4	MFL use outside class - read/list	65	35	2.8	
5	perceptions: level MFL, compared others of same age (better/worse)	96	4	3.4	X
6	perceptions: level geography, compared others of same age (better/worse)	45	55	2.5	

\* *The calculation of the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile and above was used to indicate instances of concordance, where there the majority of respondents 75% or over (X), either agree (+) or disagree (-)*

Items one to six in Part 1, were based on a four-category distribution on a scale of agreement-disagreement. Items 7-10 were open questions. These are listed as follows:

- Item 7 asked '*How important do you think it is to learn a foreign language?*' All respondents answered in the affirmative. This was then followed with '*why?*'
- Item 9 asked '*Are there advantages to learning geography in French?*' 25 respondents answered in the affirmative. Five answered that there were none. The question was then followed by an open questions.



- Item 10 began with a cross-reference to item 9: 'Are there any disadvantages to learning geography in French?' 4 pupils answered in the affirmative, 25 replied that there were none. Respondents were then asked to list the disadvantages.

Open-ended follow up questions Items 7, 8, 9 and 10 showing emergent categories				
Item	Function and purpose	Emerging categories	f.counts 1	Notes
7	importance of speaking MFL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>employment</li> <li>culture(relationship, living abroad, meetng)</li> <li>communication</li> <li>business/Europe</li> <li>travel</li> <li>fun</li> <li>other</li> </ul>	20 10 9 9 2 1 0	X X X X
8	list 3 favourite subjects in order of preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sport</li> <li>French</li> <li>History</li> <li>English</li> <li>Science</li> <li>Technology</li> <li>Art</li> <li>Maths</li> <li>Biology</li> <li>IT</li> <li>Geography</li> <li>RE</li> </ul>	36 2 32 32 18 12 11 10 9 8 3 2 1	X X X         X
9	advantages of learning geography in French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improves French</li> <li>improves study skills</li> <li>efficient learning/ increases geo knowl</li> <li>other</li> <li>none</li> </ul>	17 11 7 5 0	X X X
10	disadvantages of learning geography in French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>comprehension probs</li> <li>dislike teaching</li> <li>lack progression</li> <li>slower pace</li> <li>language saturation</li> <li>other</li> <li>none</li> </ul>	25 5 4 4 1 4 0	X

*Note*

- f counts refer to frequency counts where respondents contribute more than suggestion. The maximum count for each separate suggestion within any one item is 29 (n=29)*
- The list of favourite subjects was calculated by awarding each subject in first position 3 points, second position 2 points and third position 1 point. This gives*

*an overall score.*

### **Analysis**

The general indications drawn from the data suggest a positive group of learners who like French. They also like history which is another subject taught in French. Their reaction to geography is divided in a ratio of 1:2 of those who are positive and those negative. In other words, a greater proportion of pupils reported not liking geography. In fact, geography was ranked 11<sup>th</sup> out of 12 in a list of favourite subjects, with French and history in joint second place.

The data also suggested that the learners were motivated. This was illustrated by unanimous concordance of the importance of modern language learning (MFL) and by reported extensive use of foreign language outside the classroom. The latter could be influenced by the fact that half the class are boarders who inevitably spend time together out of class, by the bilingual group's role in assisting with the French Club in school and by the strong international ethos in the school, where speaking in a language other than English is encouraged. The reasons given for perceiving MFL as important, focussed particularly on future employment, cultural reasons and communication. Again, this is reflected in the aims of PCS, where there is emphasis on work experience abroad, where learners spend stretches of time living in the target country and where communication at all levels is encouraged.

In terms of the advantages of bilingual education, there was almost unanimity (96%) amongst those who felt that their level of French was superior to learners of the same age

and ability who were not studying in bilingual classes. There were 17 counts (n=29) of those who felt it improved their French, with 11 counts of those who felt it developed their study skills (e.g. capacity to learn more at the same time and to deal with challenging work). Learner perceptions regarding the effects of bilingual learning on geography were divided. 55% of respondents reported believing that they were less competent than their peers in other schools who were learning geography through English. There were 25 counts out of a possible 29 of learners who suggested that comprehension in geography lessons was a ‘problem’.

**Part 2: Individual perceptions of language learning and geography in terms of affect (opinions/attitudes) and skills/activities**

The 18 items listed below, invited respondents to indicate their agreement (+) or disagreement (-) with statements. The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile or above (X) is used to show concordance by the majority.

<b>Affect and skills: learner perceptions statements of agreement/disagreement</b>					
Item	Function or purpose	Postve +%	Negtve -%	Mean	Pcentile
1	affect: French is difficult	37	63	2.2	
13	affect: Fr is harder to learn than Eng	35	65	2.2	
3	affect: Geo/Fr raises self-confidence	65	35	2.5	
6	affect: Geo/Fr frustration	60	40	2.8	
8	affect: Geo/Fr interesting	17	83	2.0	X
10	affect: Geo/Fr proves I cope with challenge	75	25	2.9	X
14	affect: Geo/Fr makes me special	48	52	2.4	
2	in Geo: read more Fr	14	86	1.8	X



<b>Affect and skills: learner perceptions statements of agreement/disagreement</b>					
4	in Geo: hear more Fr	10	90	1.6	X
11	in Geo: speak more Fr	3	97	1.6	X
16	in Geo: write more Fr	45	55	2.5	
15	in Geo: learn more vocabulary	27	73	2.0	
12	in Geo: learn more grammar	7	93	1.5	X
9	in Geo: learner greater variety of Fr	31	69	1.9	
7	in Geo: operate at higher Fr level	56	44	2.9	
5	in Geo: homework problems	55	45	2.5	
17	Geo/ Fr slower Geo pace	55	45	2.6	
18	Geo/Fr faster Fr pace	59	41	2.6	

### **Analysis**

The rather negative view of geography was reinforced (I refer the reader to Part 1) in that the majority of respondents did not find geography 'interesting'. However, the data suggested that the respondents reacted positively to the principle of bilingual geography since according to the majority, it 'proves that they can cope with challenge'. There was an even distribution (48%-52%) of those who felt it made them feel 'special'. The data did reveal however that the majority of respondents did not perceive that they listened to, spoke or read more French in geography than in French lessons. The corollary of course is that respondents felt they heard, spoke and read more French in language lessons: their views on whether they did more writing in French or geography was equally distributed.

Whilst it is understandable that they were all but unanimous with regard to the learning of grammar in language lessons, the data suggested to me that the respondents shared very different attitudes towards their geography and French lessons. It was not within the

remit of this study to delve into learners' attitudes towards teachers, their teaching styles and so on, since I had assured the staff at both sites that the focus of the study was neither the teachers nor the teaching. However, it may be that certain related factors emerge during different research episodes. For the remainder of the items in Part 2, there was a spread of views.

### **Part 3: Exploring issues raised in Part 2**

Part 3 of the questionnaire aimed at probing into the skills which the pupils thought they were developing in geography, the activities in which they were most usually engaged-in both geography and French lessons, and their perceptions of differences between geography and French in terms of linguistic level and transfer.

- Items 1 and 2 were open questions which were analysed according to frequency.
- Item 3 simply asked the pupils to put the four skills in order of what they felt they could do 'best'.
- Item 4 began with a yes/no question:

*Do you think there are differences between the French you use in language lessons and in geography lessons?*

All but one pupil responded in the affirmative. The respondents were then asked to state what they thought these differences were. These are listed in the table, item 4.

- Item 5 began by asking individuals to reflect upon whether the level of French used in geography was higher than, the same as or lower than language used in French lessons. The answers were as follows:

higher than 12 respondents

same as 1 respondent

lower than 16 respondents

This yields a very interesting observation. All the pupils who had replied in the affirmative gave the higher and more complex range of vocabulary as the reason for their answer.

<b>Open-ended questions exploring issues raised in Part 2 Part 3, items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, showing emergent categories</b>				
<b>Item</b>	<b>Function and purpose</b>	<b>Emerging categories</b>	<b>f.counts</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>most frequent geography activities</b>	• map work	19	X
		• copying (sheets, board, texts, OHT)	16	X
		• filling in sheets	11	
		• discussions	11	X
<b>2</b>	<b>most frequent French activities</b>	• speaking/discussion	26	X
		• listening	19	
		• grammar	13	
		• reading	12	
		• vocabulary learning	9	
<b>3</b>	<b>what can do 'best' in French</b>	• listening	16	X X
		• speaking	15	
		• reading	8	
		• writing	2	
<b>4</b>	<b>differences between Fr/Fr &amp; Fr/Geo</b>	• vocabulary 'technical'	13	
		• lang not 'explained'	8	
		• specific content rather than 'ordinary' lang	5	
		• Fr/Geo more complex	4	
<b>5</b>	<b>reasons for level of lang higher in geography than French</b>	• range of vocabulary	12	
		• concentrate more	1	

### **Analysis**

Responses from the first three items, suggest that predictably in geography, the highest frequency of activity reported concerned 'typical' activities such as map work. At the



time of the questionnaire the respondents were in fact concentrating on map work whilst studying different countries. However, there were 16 out of a possible 29 occurrences of copying activities including copying from the board, sheets, transparencies. This could be linked to the 'interest' factor since copying is not generally perceived as an 'interesting' activity.

For language lesson activities, important data emerged. 26 out of a possible 29 respondents put speaking or discussion as the most frequent activity. Discussion was the word used by respondents: it did not appear in the rubric of the questionnaire. Discussion was also selected by 11 respondents out of 29 as a geography activity. The concept of discussion, I felt, was pertinent to this study, because I had the feeling (I can only base this on observational evidence from visiting many many classrooms in my role as teacher educator) that this word would not be used by most year 9 learners to describe speaking activities in languages classrooms. I shall return to this subsequently. Listening was considered to be the next most frequent activity in language lessons. The data confirmed learner perceptions as being evenly distributed amongst those who thought they were 'best' at listening and at speaking (16 occurrences and 15 occurrences respectively).

Both items 4 and 5 raised the issue of vocabulary. Whilst there was concordance about differences between the French used in geography and in French lessons, there were 13 occurrences from those who believed that the differences were to do with the vocabulary being more 'technical'. 8 respondents suggested that the differences were to do with teaching style, i.e. language was not explained in the same way. Item five, also raised an interesting point. There was no concordance between the respondents as to whether

the level of language used in geography was higher than in French lessons. Of the 12 who thought it was, this was related to the level of vocabulary used, but there were 16 who perceived the level of French they used in language lessons was higher. Whilst I proceed with some caution about 'reading too much' into the data during the first Research Episode, nonetheless, a picture was beginning to unfold of the social context of the different classrooms.

#### **Part 4: Focus on learning strategies**

Learning strategies were divided into two broad categories:

- **making sense by seeking and using solutions (strategies)**
  - A understanding
  - B using guessing strategies
  - C reacting to breakdowns in understanding/the *what now* approach
  - D strategies to use when speaking
  - F coping with new words
  
- **awareness of organising and evaluating learning**
  - E out of class strategies (including some relevant new words items)
  - G assessing progress (linguistic and content progression)

The following items are based on the same four-category distribution agreement (+) disagreement (-) scale.

**Part 4: Learning Strategies: Seeking and Using Solutions**

**What now? What next?**

**understanding: A, guessing: B, compensations: C, speaking: D, new words: F**

item	function or purpose	positive + %	negative - %	mean	percen tile
A1	automatic understanding	86	14	3.1	X
A2	ignore bits not understood	27	73	2.0	
A3	repeat sounds in head to work out meaning in English	79	21	3.1	X
A4	guess-don't understand so guess	82	18	3.1	X
B1	guess without thinking: blurt out Eng	17	83	1.8	X
B2	guess when sounds (Fr/Eng) similar	79	21	2.9	X
B3	guess a lot	44	56	2.4	
B4	guess- without thinking: blurt out Fr	45	55	2.5	
B5	guess-think in Fr then guess in Eng	31	69	2.0	
B6	guess by looking for clues	82	18	3.1	X
B7	guess- think in mix of Fr/Eng, guess in Eng	49	51	2.5	
B8	guess- think in Fr then guess in Fr	62	38	2.7	
B9	guess by using prior knowledge	100	0	3.2	X
C1	wait for teacher to explain	17	83	2.0	X
C2	don't understand-ask neighbour in Eng	34	66	2.2	
C3	don't understand-ask neighbour in Fr	55	45	2.6	
C4	don't understand: work things out with friends in Eng	25	75	2.0	X
C5	don't say much, but understand	48	52	2.2	
C6	don't understand: use a dictionary	25	75	3.1	X
C7	don't understand: check answers with neighbour	55	45	2.5	
C8	don't understand: work out what not understood then learn	76	21	2.9	X
C9	don't like speaking out in front peers	28	72	1.9	
C10	pretend to understand	6	94	1.5	X
C11	don't understand: work things out with friends in Fr	51	49	2.4	



**Part 4: Learning Strategies: Seeking and Using Solutions**

**What now? What next?**

**understanding: A, guessing: B, compensations: C, speaking: D, new words: F**

C12	don't understand: ask teacher for help	79	21	3.1	X
C13	worries when not understanding all	42	58	2.7	
C14	don't understand: rely on mates	14	86	3.6	X
C15	concentrate hard in Geo - prevents not understanding	75	25	3.0	X
C16	don't understand: work things out with friends in mix of Fr and Eng	69	31	2.8	
D1	speaking out: use Fr already known	94	6	3.4	X
D2	speaking out: unknown word use a simple explanation in Fr	96	4	3.5	X
D3	speaking out: unknown word use Eng word in middle of Fr	14	86	1.9	X
D4	speaking out: don't bother	14	86	1.9	X
D5	speaking out: unknown word- ask teacher or friend	92	8	3.4	X
D6	speaking out: unknown word-use substitute another Fr word	86	14	3.1	X
D7	I speak to Geo teacher mainly in Fr	55	45	2.6	
D8	I use Fr from Geo in Fr lessons	86	14	3.1	X
D9	I speak with friends in Geo mainly in Eng	45	55	2.5	
D10	I speak with friends in Geo in a mix	51	49	2.5	
D11	I use Fr from Fr lessons in Geo	93	7	3.3	X
D12	I speak to Fr teacher mainly in Fr	86	14	3.3	X
D13	I speak with friends in Geo mainly in Fr	38	62	2.2	
F1	vocab: use written bilingual lists	97	3	3.9	X
F2	vocab: use monolingual list (Fr)	3	97	3.7	X

**Analysis**

The focus of this analysis was not the 'slicing' and dividing of strategies into categories, which seems to have become a preoccupation with some researchers. I felt that in this

Research Episode, it was more relevant to gain an insight into how the learners perceived their strategic competence before 'testing' this out in different learning contexts. I have used, as before, the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile or above as a measure of concordance which merits analysis.

The data suggested that generally learners were pro-active in seeking understanding - a high proportion do not wait for the teacher to explain (C1), pretend to understand (C10) opt out of participation (D4) or rely on their peers (C14). What emerged however was that the majority of learners engage in the following:

repetition techniques	retain French sound whilst work out English sense; and for learning new words;
guessing techniques	rather than 'blurting out', use cognates, prior knowledge and contextual clues;
vocabulary learning	use bilingual lists rather than monolingual or sentence patterns;
speaking strategies	substitution of other words; circumlocution; using prior knowledge and transfer; use of French to communicate with peers and teachers;
collaborative strategies	collaboration with peers-reported as taking place in a mix of languages, not uniquely in English, as was checking with and asking peers; ask teacher for help;
other learning strategies	work with gaps in knowledge; transfer of

knowledge from geography to French and vice versa; concentrate hard.

The data suggested a range of strategies being used. It is perhaps worth noting that there was the low reported use of dictionaries (1:3). There seemed to be a willingness to seek help from the teacher but less so from friends, although collaborating with friends in both English and French was reported in 69% of cases. Speaking in French, English or a mixture with peers during lessons, as opposed to working with them, was more or less evenly distributed. However, the high consensus items (those in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile) largely indicated a confident community, willing to communicate, seeking assistance as the 'norm', who actively transferred knowledge and language use between geography and French lessons.

<b>Part 4: Learning Strategies</b> <b>Awareness of organising and evaluating learning</b> <b>out of class: E, new words: F, assessing progress: G</b>					
item	function or purpose	positive + %	negative - %	mean	percentile
E1	at home: I try to use Fr	76	24	2.8	X
E2	at home: I practise Fr on my own	65	35	2.8	
E3	at home: I learn new vocab	82	18	3.1	X
E4	at home: regularly go over work from class	73	27	2.7	
E5	at home: regularly do homework	100	0	3.6	X
F7	I don't learn new words	0	100	1.0	X
F8	I regularly go over new words	75	25	2.9	X
F9	I only learn new words for a test	31	69	2.3	
G1	eval: able to discuss Geo issues Fr	43	57	2.6	
G2	eval: able to write opinions in Fr	58	42	2.5	



<b>Part 4: Learning Strategies</b> <b>Awareness of organising and evaluating learning</b> <b>out of class: E, new words: F, assessing progress: G</b>					
G3	eval: able to express oral opinions Fr	86	14	3.3	X
G4	eval: Geo knowledge is increasing	75	25	3.2	X
G5	eval: Geo is confusing in Fr	44	56	3.0	
G6	eval: can't say or write what want in Fr -it's frustrating	31	69	3.7	
G7	eval: can almost say or write what want in Fr	89	11	2.1	X
G8	eval: Can get by in Fr/Geo	86	14	3.3	X
G9	eval: Fr/Geo is frustrating	35	65	2.3	

Data from this section of the questionnaire, suggested that the group was committed to homework and out-of-class learning. There was also a high consensus regarding their perceived competence in being able to say more or less what they wanted to in French. (Again it is unlikely that this phenomenon would correspond with year 9 learners in average comprehensive schools). The following data were based on a concordance at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile or above:

out-of-class learning

use of French outside class; do homework; learn new vocabulary; go over new words;

assessing progress

able to express opinions orally; some frustration at inability to express self as in English; acknowledgement that can more or less express self; geography knowledge increasing; concept of 'get by' in geography in French

## **Summary of analysis at PCS**

The general picture which emerged from the questionnaires was one of a group of motivated learners who liked French - less so geography. They felt confident at being able to express themselves (more or less) and responded proactively to breakdowns in communication or understanding. They regularly engaged in discussions in the target language in both lessons but especially French, and felt that they were competent at speaking and listening. They used a range of strategies but did not perceive themselves as being dependent on each other. A somewhat contradictory view of 'collaboration' was presented and this will be explored further in the next Research Episode.

## **The SEC: Questionnaire presentation and analysis**

### **Presentation and analysis of Parts 1-4**

The questionnaire administered at the SEC was identical to the one at PCS except of course the target language was Spanish. It is my intention to briefly present the findings of Parts 1 to 3 of the questionnaire to allow the reader to gain a picture of the SEC from the learners' perspective. The data were analysed using identical procedures, taking the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile and above as a guide for positive or negative concordance.

In addition, significant differences between the two sites were calculated using comparative statistical procedures. Part 4 particularly focusses on a comparison of learners at PCS and the SEC and their reported strategy use.

**Part 1: General background information to situate individuals and their foreign language learning context**

Responses to two preliminary questions were as follow:

- *Have you ever been to a Spanish-speaking country?*

21% (5 learners out of the 23 learners) had not.

- *Do you know any native speakers of Spanish?*

The Spanish teacher is in fact a Spanish national, so clearly all pupils know a native speaker.

Items one to six in Part 1, were based on a four-category distribution on a scale of agreement-disagreement.

<b>Part One: Background Information on Attitudes to and Perceptions of Modern Language Learning and Geography</b>					
item	function or purpose	positive +%	negative -%	mean	percentile
1	school subjects - like MFL	65	36	3.0	
2	school subjects - like geography	78	22	3.0	X
3	MFL use outside class - speak	25	75	2.0	X
4	MFL use outside class - read/listn	48	52	2.2	
5	perceptions: level MFL, compared others of same age (better/worse)	82	18	3.1	X
6	perceptions: level geography compared those same age (better/worse)	65	36	2.5	

Items 7-10 were open questions. These are listed below:

- Item 7 asked *'How important do you think it is to learn a foreign language?'*

75% respondents answered in the affirmative. The reasons were explored by the question *'why?'*



- Item 9 asked '*Are there advantages to learning geography in Spanish?*  
75% respondents answered in the affirmative. Six answered that there were none.  
This was then followed up by an open question.
- Item 10 began with a cross-reference to item 9: '*Are there any disadvantages to learning geography in Spanish?*' 5 pupils (22%) answered in the affirmative, 18 replied that there were none (78%).

Open-ended follow up questions Items 7, 8, 9 and 10 showing emergent categories				
Item	Function and purpose	Emerging categories	f.counts 1	Notes
7	importance of speaking MFL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employment</li> <li>• communication</li> <li>• travel</li> <li>• culture (relationship, living abroad, meeting)</li> <li>• other</li> <li>• fun</li> <li>• business/Europe</li> </ul>	15 8 5 4 2 0 0	X   X
8	list 3 favourite subjects in order of preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English 2</li> <li>• Science</li> <li>• Sport</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Biology</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Maths</li> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Spanish</li> <li>• Art</li> <li>• RE</li> </ul>	29 23 20 12 8 8 6= 6= 6= 5 4 3	       X X
9	advantages of learning geography in Spanish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improves Spanish</li> <li>• improves study skills</li> <li>• none</li> <li>• other</li> <li>• efficient learning/ increases geo knowl</li> </ul>	17 9 5 5 4	X

Open-ended follow up questions Items 7, 8, 9 and 10 showing emergent categories				
10	disadvantages of learning geography in Spanish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• slower pace</li> <li>• comprehension probs</li> <li>• lack progression</li> <li>• none</li> <li>• dislike teaching</li> <li>• language saturation</li> <li>• other</li> </ul>	9 8 7 5 2 2 2	X   X

1. *f counts refer to frequency counts where respondents could contribute more than suggestion. The maximum count for each separate suggestion within any one item is 29 (n=29)*
2. *The list of favourite subjects was calculated by awarding each subject in first position 3 points, second position 2 points and third position 1 point. This gives an overall score.*

### Comparative Analysis of Part 1

Unlike at PCS, the data suggests that the boys at the SEC like geography more than Spanish (75%), with only a very small number speaking Spanish outside the classroom (75% do not). There was a significant difference in attitudes to foreign language learning between the two sites ( $p = .025$ ). This of course could be linked to gender since traditionally foreign language study is often perceived as a 'girls' subject', whereas geography is neutral (Clark 1998). In addition, since none of the respondents board at school, then there are also fewer opportunities for using Spanish outside the classroom. Although geography is ranked by the boys as joint 7<sup>th</sup> out of twelve favourite subjects, Spanish is next in 10<sup>th</sup> place. However, the data implies that the majority feels that modern language study is important (75% - compared to 100% at PCS). Employment (15/23 counts) and communication (8/23) were given as the two main reasons. Of the 75% who replied that there were definite advantages in learning geography in Spanish, all of them cited improving language skills as the main advantage. In terms of disadvantages, 22% replied in the affirmative. When asked what disadvantages there

might be, 9/23 listed a slower pace in geography; 8/23 cited difficulties in comprehension; and 7/23 a seeming lack of progress.

**Part 2: Individual perceptions of language learning and geography in terms of affect (opinions and attitudes) and skills/ activities.**

The 18 items listed below, invited respondents to indicate their agreement (+) or disagreement (-) with statements. The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile or above (X) is used to show concordance by the majority.

<b>Affect and skills: learner perceptions statements of agreement/disagreement</b>					
<b>Item</b>	<b>Function or purpose</b>	<b>Positive +%</b>	<b>Negative -%</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Perctl</b>
1	affect: Spanish is difficult	65	35	2.8	
13	affect: Sp is harder to learn than Eng	17	83	1.6	X
3	affect: Geo/Sp raises self-confidence	47	53	2.0	
6	affect: Geo/Sp frustration	56	44	2.9	
8	affect: Geo/Sp interesting	52	48	2.6	
10	affect: Geo/Sp proves I cope with challenge	78	22	2.8	X
14	affect: Geo/Sp makes me special	34	66	2.2	
2	in Geo: read more Sp	22	78	1.9	X
4	in Geo: hear more Sp	13	87	1.6	X
11	in Geo: speak more Sp	17	83	1.8	X
16	in Geo: write more Sp	48	52	2.5	
15	in Geo: learn more vocabulary	83	17	3.1	X
12	in Geo: learn more grammar	8	92	3.8	X
9	in Geo: learner greater variety of Sp	43	57	2.5	
7	in Geo: operate at higher Sp level	60	40	2.9	



<b>Affect and skills: learner perceptions statements of agreement/disagreement</b>					
5	in Geo: homework problems	56	44	2.7	
17	Geo/ Sp slower pace than in Geo	66	34	3.0	
18	Geo/Sp faster pace than in Sp	96	4	3.1	X

## **Comparative Analysis of Part 2**

Whilst there was a significant difference ( $p=.022$ ) between PCS and the SEC learner perceptions of the difficulty of foreign language learning - more boys reported finding the foreign language difficult than those at PCS, the boys also felt that learning in Spanish proved they could cope with a challenge. However, what is most interesting is a reversal between respondents in the two sites of the skills and activities believed to be developed in geography and language lessons. At the SEC, the data suggested that learners believed they listened to, spoke and read more Spanish in geography lessons than in language lessons. They also felt they learned more vocabulary ( $p=0.000$ ) and went at a faster pace in geography lessons ( $p=0.007$ ). The picture which began to unfold was one of a group of learners, who were positive about their geography experiences in terms of the quality and quantity of learning. There was also a significant difference in relative interest generated ( $p=0.021$ ) since at the SEC 52% of the group claimed that geography was more interesting than language lessons, whereas only 15% at PCS answered in the affirmative.

### **Part 3: Exploring issues raised in Part 2**

- Items 1 and 2 were open questions asking respondents to list the activities in which they were most often engaged in geography and language lessons. This was analysed according to frequency.
- Item 3 asked them to assess their 'best' skill.
- Item 4 began with a yes/no question:

*Do you think there are differences between the Spanish you use in language lessons and in geography lessons?*

All the pupils responded in the affirmative. The respondents were then asked to state what they thought these differences were. These are listed in the table on the next page.

- Item 5 began by asking individuals to reflect upon whether the level of Spanish used in geography was higher than, the same as or lower than language used in Spanish lessons. The answers were as follows:

higher than      13 respondents

same as            3 respondents

lower than        7 respondents

In contrast to PCS, more respondents believed that the level of Spanish in geography lessons was higher. This confirms the views expressed in Part 2 that the SEC group perceived learning more Spanish in geography lessons than language lessons.

Open ended answers to probes of issues raised in Part 2 Part 3, items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, showing emergent categories				
Item	Function and purpose	Emerging categories	f.counts	Notes
1	most frequent geography activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maps/ graphs/work</li> <li>• copying (sheets, board, texts, OHT)</li> <li>• learning vocabulary</li> <li>• project work</li> </ul>	20 11 11 8	X X X
2	most frequent Spanish activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• speaking</li> <li>• writing</li> <li>• listening</li> </ul>	18 14 9	X
3	what can do 'best' in Spanish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading</li> <li>• speaking</li> <li>• listening</li> <li>• writing</li> </ul>	11 9 6 0	X
4	differences between Sp/Sp & Geo/Sp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vocabulary 'technical'</li> <li>• Geo/Sp more complex</li> </ul>	19 4	
5	reasons for level of lang higher in geography than Sp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• range of vocabulary</li> <li>• concentrate more</li> </ul>	11 2	

Predictably, the data suggested that the most usual activities in geography lessons were those relating to the subject itself, such as studying maps and drawing graphs (20/23 occurrences). However, interestingly, the second most frequent occurrence with 11/23 was vocabulary learning - an activity normally associated with language learning. This contrasts sharply with PCS where more 'traditional' language learning activities were perceived by the majority as belonging to the domain of language lessons. Copying-related activities also had 11/23 occurrences which corresponded to PCS.

The most frequent activity in Spanish lessons was speaking with a count of 18/23, followed by writing activities with 14/23. A majority of learners themselves felt their 'best' skill was reading (11/23 occurrences) and speaking (9/23 occurrences) There was a high degree of concurrence (19/23) concerning the main linguistic difference between



geography and Spanish. This was to do with the ‘technical’ nature of the vocabulary needed. The range of vocabulary was cited by almost half of the respondents as the reason why geography in Spanish operated at a higher linguistic level than Spanish classes. The data suggested then, that the SEC group viewed their bilingual experiences in some ways very differently from the pupils at PCS. They perceived their geography context as providing more positive experiences in terms of making progress not only in ‘geography’ skills but interestingly in language skills (including grammar learning, vocabulary extension and level of Spanish used).

#### **Part 4: Focus on learning strategies**

As before, the two categories were:

- **making sense by seeking and using solutions (strategies)**
  - A understanding
  - B using guessing strategies
  - C reacting to breakdowns in understanding/the *what now* approach
  - D strategies to use when speaking
  - F coping with new words
  
- **awareness of organising and evaluating learning**
  - E out of class strategies (including some relevant new words items)
  - G assessing progress (linguistic and content progression)

The items are based on the same four-category distribution agreement (+) disagreement (-) scale, but have been also analysed for significant difference between the two sites.

<b>Significant differences between PCS and the SEC</b>						
item	function or purpose	CPS + %	SEC + %	CPS - %	SEC - %	<i>P</i> < 0.05
P1.1	school subjects - like MFL (Fr/Sp)	100	65	0	35	.026
P1.3	MFL use outside class- speak	79	25	21	75	.001
P2.1	affect: Fr/Sp is difficult	37	63	65	35	.023
P2.8	affect: Geo/Fr Geo/Sp more interesting than MFL lessons	17	52	83	48	.021
P2.15	in Geo: learn more vocabulary	7	83	73	17	.000
P2.18	in Geo/Fr Geo/Sp faster Fr/Sp pace	59	96	41	4	.007
P4. A2	making sense: ignore bits not understd	27	61	73	39	.017
P4. B6	guess by looking for clues	82	64	18	36	.039
P4. B8	guess, think Fr/Sp then guess in Fr/Sp	62	30	38	70	.035
P4. C1	don't understand- wait for teacher to explain	17	52	83	48	.003
P4. C2	don't understand- ask neighbour in Eng	34	61	66	39	.020
P4. C3	don't understand- ask neighbour in Fr/S	55	18	45	82	.002
P4.C4	don't understand- work things out with friends in Eng	25	74	75	26	.001
P4. C5	don't say much but understand	48	72	52	28	.024
P4.C11	don't understand- work things out with friends in Fr/Sp	51	26	49	74	.012
P4.C13	worries when not understanding all	42	34	58	66	.043
P4.D3	speaking out: unknown word, use Eng word in middle of Fr/Sp	14	52	86	48	.002
P4.E2	at home: I practise Fr/Sp on my own	65	17	35	83	.000
F4	vocab: use repetition to self	80	35	20	65	.005
F6	vocab: create mental picture	55	35	45	65	.213

The data suggested that the SEC learners might be less pro-active than the PCS group in their response to not understanding - a higher proportion were prepared to wait for the teacher to explain (53%). Moreover the data suggested that the SEC respondents used English more readily than those at PCS. Strategies which appear to relate to the majority of respondents (75<sup>th</sup> percentile or above) are as follows:

<b>guessing techniques</b>	<b>use prior knowledge;</b>
<b>vocabulary learning</b>	<b>use bilingual lists rather than monolingual or sentence patterns;</b>
<b>speaking strategies</b>	<b>use of Spanish learned in language class to communicate in geography and vice versa;</b>
<b>collaborative strategies</b>	<b>collaboration with peers-reported as taking place in English, ask teacher for help;</b>
<b>other learning strategies</b>	<b>transfer of knowledge from geography to French and vice versa; concentrate hard.</b>

The data suggested a smaller range of strategies being used at the SEC. It may be, that there are gender influences especially regarding items which could be interpreted as being seen as a 'keen' learner- I refer here in particular to homework and learning vocabulary. Only 66% reported doing homework regularly as opposed to 100% at PCS. 69% reported not learning vocabulary, although 64% said they did if it was tested. Other significant differences in responses between the two groups suggested that there was greater recourse to English but that essentially the SEC group, given that they were a group of adolescent boys, were generally positive about their geography. 70% believed that they could more or less say and write what they wanted to in Spanish and 78% affirmed they could 'get by' in geography. There was little evidence to suggest that there was collaboration either in Spanish or in a mix of languages in geography or Spanish lessons.



## Reflection

The questionnaire was not designed to gain conclusive 'evidence' of classroom realities, but to try to paint some broad brush strokes about the ethos of the learning communities and the players within. The questionnaire aimed to report their perceptions of the classrooms in which they play different language games. In order to create a 'cumulative' feeling of purpose, I chose to analyse and comment on different sections of the questionnaire throughout the chapter. I felt this gave immediate meaning to the data presented by steering the reader through an on-going commentary arising from and in conjunction with the data analysis. There are no conclusions to be drawn but instead I hope the reader will begin to get a 'sense of place' around the sites and a 'sense of identity' concerning the learners. Having listened to both the 'official' voice and the learners' voice in two different learning communities, it becomes clear that very different games are being played but with potentially both similar and at times dissimilar outcomes. The message that the players' strategic learning is rooted in processes inherent in the two learning communities is explicitly emphasised. This Research Episode corresponds to what Kozulin terms 'awareness-raising work which turns the classroom from a field of activity into a subject of inquiry' (Kozulin 1990).

Their story continues...

