SOME TRENDS AND ISSUES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Introduction

The barrage of new trends and new foci in language teaching and learning can create a sense of unease among language educators, pulling them in many directions, as linguistic, cultural, technical, and educational considerations compete for time and space in their conceptual frameworks. It is a feeling shared by all those who are engaged in second language acquisition (SLA). Indeed, the burgeoning of knowledge in this discipline has made the field "virtually impossible to 'manage' " (Brown, 2000: ix), as the profession tries to integrate findings from testing, bilingual education, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and intercultural communication—just to name a few of the sub-disciplines that enrich SLA.

A second issue that arises when we focus on trends in the field is the question of whether it is all a matter of bandwagons, fads, and crusades: all promising, but not always delivering, greater efficacy in classroom-based learning. A clear consequence of this is that a fair degree of scepticism attends new claims for instructional effectiveness. Kumaravadivelu (1994) suggests however, that the profession's resolve to move beyond the search for a panacea has led to a new dynamic which he labels the "post-method" condition, namely, the choice of principled eclecticism over any single method. Brown's contention that, "our research miscarriages are fewer as we have collectively learned how to conceive the right questions" (2000:ix) also addresses the field's concern with adopting more critical approaches to research and application in foreign language education.

Reviewing the trends in foreign language education promises to be a rather complex matter. In order to keep the discussion to manageable proportions, this article has opted to examine three areas that are among the most discussed in the literature: the integration of technology, the role of affect, and the role of metacognition in language learning. Although the article devotes considerable attention to the literature on technology in foreign language education, technology is but one trend deserving of our attention. No review of current trends and issues can fail to address the place of technology in the current foreign language education curriculum. The article argues, however, that as we try to keep pace with new research and curricular innovations, adopting a stance of principled electism requires us to look at some other trends and issues likely to impact on classroom practice. While the article will look at technology, affect and metacognition as separate strands in enhancing student learning, it is their incorporation in an approach to language learning premised on learner autonomy that is ultimately advocated.

Technology and the Five Skills

Writing

A considerable body of research points to the utility of computers as an instructional tool in second or foreign language (L2) classrooms. Research conducted by Irizarry (1988), Thrush and Hardisty (1990), among others points to the salutary effect of computers on writing. Claims have been made that computers can influence learners' writing skills in number of ways, two of which will be discussed in this paper.

It appears that learners focus on form more when writing with computers than they do when writing on paper. One explanation for this is that writing onscreen encourages distance and helps writers to adopt a stance as first readers of their text. As a result, learners seem more likely to perform the editing function that is normally carried out by their teachers or peers (Davidson and Tomic 1994). But, by becoming their own first readers, learners can also enter more fully into the communicative nature of writing. They begin to develop an understanding of the need to tailor their language to the future "other' in the communicative encounter. Learners' written proficiency is likely to improve if using computers helps them develop a critical stance to both the form and content of their writing. Moreover, this could allow teachers to reconcile two objectives that sometimes seem to be mutually exclusive in classroom-based acquisition: a focus on form and a focus on meaning.

A second advantage of computers is that the ease with which learners are able to correct and change their work encourages them to see writing as a recursive process (see White and Caminero 1995, on a process approach to writing in L2 learning) which encompasses pre-writing, drafting and revision. As many educators who use computers for research or materials preparation are aware, computers afford writers such ease in revising and re-ordering what is written, that the composing process with computers is quite different from the composing process without them.

Unfortunately, less expert writers are unlikely to benefit fully from this facility, unless they have a sound understanding of what writing involves. Henner-Stanchina (1980: 66) posits, for example, that based on her observation of a group of learners of English as a second language (ESL) intermediate level learners are beset by problems more of an organizational nature than a grammatical one. She found that learners seldom paid sufficient attention to cohesion and coherence; to the hierarchization of information in a text; the levels of generality within a text and so on. Hence, teachers need to heed the warning of Davidson and Tomic (1994, 205) that learners may attend only to surface features and not be as aware of the far more problematic discourse features of their writing. Teachers will do well to teach their students strategies for surface and global revision, if students are to derive maximum benefit from the fact that computers facilitate revision.

Reading

Garrett (1991) explains how work being done in developing authoring systems for reading comprehension materials development is likely to facilitate a more interactive approach to reading comprehension, one that is more in keeping with current approaches to comprehension as interrogating text rather than simply decoding text. Garrett suggests that such authoring systems will make it possible to highlight the appropriate textual clues to allow learners to use any of the strategies commonly taught

in reading—skimming, scanning, inferring, predicting etc. Learners will therefore find several ways to navigate a text based on the strategy that they choose to employ.

All learners, but especially less proficient ones, will benefit from being able to access a variety of authentic documents that can be enhanced to render them more learner-friendly. Teachers, too, will reap benefits from the development of authoring systems for reading comprehension. Teachers usually consider text difficulty and task difficulty, when selecting authentic materials for reading. Authoring systems that can perform different treatments on the same text will allow teachers to vary task difficulty for different proficiencies. This is likely to represent a considerable time saving for teachers who spend much time searching for the appropriate level of text when they use authentic documents in class. Teachers will be able to use their time more profitably to provide more learning support for each proficiency level.

Listening

Newer language laboratories linked to computers allow learners to practise minimal pairs; or to work on getting the gist, or all the details of a piece of spoken discourse; in other words, to engage in some of the same listening activities that they have traditionally done with older labs. The advantage offered by newer laboratories stems from their use of digital instead of analogue systems. User interface is easier with a digital system. Additionally, there are other possibilities for practising listening that depend on the multimedia capacity of a computer linked to the Internet. Thus, a learner with a computer connected to the Internet can listen to Francophone radio stations, or download audio freeware, or have almost the same kind of access to audio material as if she were living in the target language country.

Speaking

A learner who can access asynchronous (for example e-mail and bulletin boards) or synchronous communication (chat rooms, ICQ) on the Internet can improve her communicative competence in ways that are seldom possible in the acquisition-poor environment of the foreign language classroom. Several studies (Bee-Lay and Yee Ping 1991; Gaer and Ferenz 1993; Sutherland and Black 1993; Marsh 1997) have produced empirical data which show that oral proficiency can be enhanced if learners engage in e-mail correspondence and tandem learning with L2 speakers. Learners, it seems, benefit from the input and output possibilities of "conversation" in the target language through the medium of e-mail. According to the data collected in the studies cited earlier, the spoken production of the participants in the studies was characterized by greater fluency, greater confidence and on the whole, richer language than those who had not been involved in e-mail exchanges. The results of those studies lend support to this author's contention that computer-mediated learning can be a boon for foreign language learners.

Classroom learning often fails to develop the sociolinguistic competence which learners acquire in naturalistic settings. Unlike their second language counterparts, foreign language learners are less likely to develop an awareness of and sensitivity to dialect and register, naturalness (or native-like use of language) and understanding of cultural referents and figures of speech (Bachman 1990 cited in Omaggio-Hadley 1993, 8). Even when classroom learning tries to meet these objectives, learners who have never had the experience of visiting a target language country have few models of authentic native speaker to native speaker (NS-NS) interaction on which to draw. However, Kinginger (1998), in reporting on a project which involved a telecollaborative arrangement between two language classes (a US-based French class and a French-based English class), sees how such projects can fill the gap and provide an immersion oral/aural experience for learners. In analysing some of the ways in which this project promoted language learning, she states, "As it becomes possible to put learners into direct, routine touch with the speech community that they are studying via videoconferencing or the Internet, the relevance of their learning is put to the test in dynamic, immediate ways." (Kinginger 1998, 510)

One of the interesting findings of the Kinginger (1998) study is the sharp contrast not only between classroom talk and NS talk, but also the gap between the standard language, as reproduced in text books, and, say, authentic spoken French (see, for example, Di Vito, 1992). This observation bolsters Joseph's (1988, 32) argument that "the structural gap between the standard dialect and what most educated people speak in most circumstances is considerably wider [for French] than for any other major European language." Joseph's contention seems to imply that unless ways are found to present this type of language to foreign language learners, (and this author suggests that a plausible way to do so is by using available technology), learners risk being exposed only to classroom talk or to a "purified" French that is far removed from the language spoken by the educated native speaker.

Culture

Learners' proficiency in the fifth skill—culture—can be dramatically improved by doing virtual tours of historic Parisian monuments or ordering goods from on-line catalogues. This point is stressed by Lee, according to whom, "(by) using Internet tools for developing students' C2 knowledge and awareness, students can begin to explore and experience both language and culture in a meaningful context" (Lee 1997, 421). In "Situating French language teaching and learning in the Age of the Internet", Gaspar (1998) explains how Internet-based learning meets the demand of the heuristic function (using language to teach, to learn and solve problems), an aspect of pragmatic competence, which it is often difficult to acquire in classroom-based acquisition. Gaspar highlights as some of the positive results of the activity:

1. An enhancement of students' research skills, i.e. their engaging in questioning, planning, gathering, sifting, synthesizing and evaluating

2. Greater motivation

3. More collaboration among students.

Gaspar's findings support Willis's (1996) analysis of the benefits to be derived from creative projects. Willis identifies brainstorming, fact-finding, ordering, sorting, comparing and problem solving as some of the processes in which learners engage when they perform creative tasks, especially where these tasks involve out-of-class research. Lastly, Hoven (1992) offers further corroboration of the ways in which technology can enhance any aspect of language learning, as "it brings the real world into the classroom; makes learning more relevant; develops the learners' sense of responsibility; develops non-linear learning and develops cooperative learning"

As this brief overview has shown, there is a growing body of research that demonstrates the efficacy of technology in language learning. Using computers and new technologies allows teachers and students to do old things in new ways. But perhaps more importantly, many creative activities that would have been formerly beyond the scope of the L2 classroom, and particularly beyond the reach of the foreign language classroom, can now be realized thanks to technology.

Technology and (Language) Learning

Although this article, for reasons of clarity, has examined how technology can be used to improve language proficiency in discrete skills, technology can also be a good tool to present language as a holistic experience and to support the integration of skills. As was noted earlier, technology promotes the adoption of a writer-reader perspective towards written texts. At another level, the way in which technology is changing communication will require a reconceptualization of many of society's current assumptions about language, about learning, and about language learning.

Warschauer's (1997) review of computer-mediated interaction discusses how computer-mediated communication (CMC) transcends the speaking-writing divide and analyses the implications of this phenomenon for education. He argues that whereas throughout history, speech has played the interactive role, and written texts, because of their permanence, have been powerful vehicles for interpretation and reflection, "the historical divide between speech and writing has been overcome with the interactional and reflective aspects of language merged in a single medium: CMC". Many educators (see for example, Gaspar 1998; Healy Beauvois 1992), describing projects using synchronous and asynchronous communication, have noted how these modes of expression have led their students to be more reflective. Their observations and Warschauer's analysis should alert us to the fact that while there is some merit in the discipline's enthusiasm about the promise of technology doing old things better, it is the new things happening through technology that can create excitement.

Another aspect of the technology-learning link that is of interest to language teachers is technology's role in facilitating differential learning. Brown's (1994) contention that technology supports differentiation in learning, of goals, activities and outcomes is hardly controversial, since technology frees teacher and student from the traditional lockstep approach. Given the discipline's current focus on individual learning differences, many teachers will feel justified in the adoption of technology to offer students a variety of learning opportunities, more in consonance with their (the students') individual preferences. But, a principled approach to the integration of technology cannot be overemphasized.

What will be the implication of Skehan's (1991) assertion that not only do learners differ in their perceptual learning styles, showing a preference for auditory, visual, or kinaesthetic stimuli, but also differ in their orientation to language learning? How will technology improve the proficiency of a learner with a linguistic orientation to language learning, one who sees language learning as a pattern-making problem, or conversely, one who is more memory dependent and draws on a number of chunks or pre-fabricated elements to form new utterances? These are some of the research issues that will need to be investigated in order to help teachers adopt that principled approach.

Another way in which technology is positively associated with learning is the link between technology and motivation (Gaspar 1998; Hoven 1992; Le Loup and Ponterio 1996; Schwartz 1995; Warschauer, 1997). Le Loup and Ponterio, and Schwartz both stress that today's students are likely to be far more visually oriented than a previous generation of students. Hence, the interactive nature of modern technology makes it far more attractive to learners who have grown up with videos, hand-held games, and other multi-media. The latter authors think that even very attractive text-based materials are unlikely to capture learners' interest because they are not interactive. Hoven and Gaspar also stress that when technology brings the real world into the classroom, learning seems more relevant and is more likely to engage a learner's feelings. These observations are especially important in light of Higgs's statement that that "the relevance of the task to the student promotes intrinsic motivation and a deep (or meaning oriented) approach to learning" (Higgs 1988, 50). When these findings are juxtaposed to research which suggests that students who are intrinsically motivated are better poised to take advantage of learning opportunities (Lambert and McCombs 1998) the case for technology as a motivating factor in L2 learning is strengthened.

Looking at the literature on the integration of technology, it is evident that experiential, goal-oriented, real-world activities, and not pedagogical activities are those that generate the greatest enthusiasm among students. Many of the activities made possible through the medium of computers and new technologies are not the traditional skill-getting/using activities, but activities that involve students in a truly task-based approach (Willis 1996) to language learning. Students seem to prefer using computers and new technologies to do in the L2 some of the things they frequently do in their L1, for example, chat online, surf the Internet to gather information, and use word processors for writing. In summary, the fact that students demonstrate a preference for real-world activities in their use of technology further solidifies the link between technology and current approaches to language learning. Richard and Rodgers (1986) stress that a communicative approach to language learning is premised on three important principles, namely, communication, task, and meaningfulness. Integrating technology into language learning is likely to support all three principles.

Technology not only grounds language learning in real-world communicative tasks, but by highlighting learning it underscores the educational value of language learning which some argue is often lost through a narrow linguistic/second language acquisition focus (see Robertson 1993; Pennycook 1997; van Lier 1996). An important concern among educators is the potential of the classroom as a site to develop transferable skills and the skills of lifelong learning. If students understand how in-class learning can support out-of-class learning, and vice-versa, then based on this understanding they can develop ways to maintain their communicative competence once the period of formal instruction is over. The

development of this kind of language awareness augurs well for students' acquisition of skills for lifelong learning, and for their growth as autonomous (language) learners. Given what is known about acquiring foreign language proficiency—that it is an ongoing task and should not be thought of as finished when formal instruction ends—it is important to have students appreciate the concept of lifelong (language) learning. Trim underscores the importance of "'learning to learn', helping learners acquire the necessary attitudes, knowledge, understanding, skills and strategies for life-long language learning" (Trim 1996, 83).

The final link between technology and learning that this article wishes to explore addresses once again a more critical approach to learning with technology. Bélisle underscores the complexity of the user-technology interface and the implications for the kind of learning required when she says,

> Apprendre avec des technologies multimédia est une activité complexe . . . dans les environments d'apprentissage multimédia, l'interactivité est un concept central car le choix des lecteurs-usagers-apprenants est déterminant. Ces systèmes sont liés à une conception de l'apprenant où l'apprenant est actif (Bélisle 1998, 12).

> (Learning with multimedia technology is a complex activity. . . in a multimedia environment, interactivity is a key concept because the pathway through a programme hinges on the choice that the readers-users-learners make. These systems are therefore premised on a conception of the learner as an active participant in her learning.)

Many other educators (Brown 1994; Garrett 1991; Knapper 1988) have expressed similar views. Brown, for example, discusses this consideration in terms of a more critical approach that "may have as its goal an attempt to change learners' knowledge structures and the way they conceive problems or issues either in or across subjects." Hammond, Gardner, Heath, Kibby, Mayes, McAleese, Mullings, and Trapp (1992: 161) spell out in detail what adopting such a critical approach to technology in learning implies:

> . . . the idea that the computer can be a learning tool to help students learn, not so much by acting as a multimedia delivery mechanism for knowledge, but by augmenting the learner's ability to ask questions, to explore, to form active strategies and so forth, is an idea that is so obvious that we (the converts) do not even bother to spell it out. Yet the full implementation of this idea would have the most radical consequences for higher education. It would mean that we would be accepting responsibility for shaping the learning process. This is not something that Universities have previously been anxious to do. In fact, to do so would require a reappraisal of priorities because what is being offered is not a technological "fix" to make higher education more cost effective, but a requirement to take seriously something that has previously only received lip-service, that is learning itself.

A final quotation from Gaspar (1998, 74) sums up what this article has identified as some of the major benefits of technology in the classroom:

> One of the great challenges to teachers is to create an environment that makes learning fun, engaging, and productive since an emotionally-engaged student is one that benefits from the

learning process. Likewise, we often search out instances in which students are encouraged to teach themselves. Proceeding as knowledge navigators or modern day bricoleurs with the tools of learning in hand, perhaps our students will discover that a sustained intellectual curiosity enriches their lives.

In the same way that technology offers learners a multiplicity of approaches into language learning, so too teachers interested in exploring the applications of technology in L2 learning can adopt several approaches to the integration of technology. Teachers must have a clear understanding of what technology can do in L2 learning and be able to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of using technology to promote efficacy in classroom-based acquisition. However, that is just a "surface level" approach to the issue of technology. At a more conceptual level, in a "deep level" approach, teachers must also come to an understanding of how teaching and learning are reconfigured in a learning environment supported by technology. Theorizing technology in this way will mean moving beyond a narrow technical approach to a more critical approach to technology in (language) learning.

Affect in Language Learning

Student Extract Number 1

> Grammar is taught primarily through the use of texts. The simple practice of using day-to-day examples incorporating the grammar point brings the language at a more practical level making the concept easier for the student to grasp. Show us your personal way of overcoming grammar problems that you may have had in the past. Sometimes texts don't say it all.

> Mrs. C. needs to demonstrate her passion for French in her teaching. In her attempt to attain a level of teaching professionalism she distances herself from the class.

> (First Year Student 1996/7 End of Year Evaluation)

Student Extract Number 2

> I began to study French for the first time when I was in form one at high school. I remember looking at the board and wondering what in the world was that. It looked like Greek to me and it also sounded like Greek to me. Little did I know that I would grow to love the language passionately.

> I received a wonderful introduction to the language because of the teacher that I was privileged to have. Her name was Mme C. and she really made the language come alive for me. I nurtured this language to see all the places she talked about.

> (First Year Student 1997/8 Learner Autobiography)

These two extracts reveal how affective factors play an important role in classroom-based learning. While the second student had a positive beginning to her language learning, and this sustained her and empowered her in her own efforts at learning French, the first student's fairly positive evaluation of the teacher's instructional techniques is overshadowed by her disappointment about the teacher's lack of personal involvement. The student's dissatisfaction does not stem from poor teaching per se, but from the failure of the teacher to make the emotional connection and provide appropriate support during learning.

A focus on human values and human relations in the classroom was one of the trends in language teaching in the late 60s and early 70s. According to Stern (1983) this was in reaction against the mechanical and "cold" drill techniques of the audio-lingual era. Methodologies such as the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, and Suggestopedia were created in response to the need to manage students' feelings and attend to the affective climate in the classroom. This focus on the affective side of language learning is once again becoming pronounced in current second language acquisition literature. Arnold and Brown (1999) state that one of the "mega-trends" for learning in the twenty-first century is likely to be a focus on whole-brain learning, including the role played by affect.

As the first extract cited above demonstrates, focusing on the cognitive dimension of learning and neglecting the affective side creates a certain imbalance, and this has repercussions on the entire learning experience. Underhill (1999) proposes a framework that is helpful in shedding light on the significance of these two extracts. He suggests that teachers can relate to their students in one of three ways: as lecturer, as teacher, or as facilitator. There is a hierarchical organization implied here, so that the higher levels—teacher and facilitator—include the skills and knowledge of the lower levels. Thus, the lecturer in Underhill's framework is a teacher in any educational context who has knowledge of the topic taught but no special skill or interest in the techniques and methodology of teaching it.

At the next level, the teacher has the skills of the lecturer, but possesses other skills also. The facilitator combines all the attributes of the lecturer and teacher, but adds an important dimension, the relationship she establishes with the students:

> As a facilitator my triple area of expertise consists of my knowledge of the subject matter, my skilful use of teaching methods, and my developing capacity to generate a psychological climate conducive to high quality learning. My enlarged equation connecting people and learning embraces the psychological learning atmosphere itself, which in turn contains all the work we do on language and all the learning techniques we use.

Although many educators stress the importance of the teacher-learner relationship in language learning (Moskowitz 1999; Wright 1987), the role of affect in learning and the teacher's responsibility for providing affective support is often considered to be less important than cognition and the teacher's responsibility for providing cognitive scaffolding. But as the students' accounts and the literature on affect show, a focus on cognition without an equal focus on affect is inadequate and could prove deleterious to learning.

Lambert and McCombs (1998, 18) maintain that "the nature of the classroom environment, particularly the degree to which it is nurturing or not, can also have significant impacts on student learning." When learners are asked to do new things, to behave in new ways in the classroom, in other words, when an instructional innovation is being introduced, as will be the case in a technology-enhanced context, there is undoubtedly going to be an even greater need for managing the affective climate and its impact on student learning. Yet, Katz (1996) contends that it is not uncommon that discussions on educational innovations focus on the innovations and on the benefits of these innovations and pay little attention to how the innovations will be implemented in the existing context. She suggests that the failure to examine teacher-student interaction and how it is influenced by educational innovations is a serious lacuna in language education research.

How will teachers and students interact in an environment where technology supports learning? What will be the learners' affective needs in those contexts and how will teachers support those needs? Underhill's conceptualization of a facilitator (see also Voller 1997) is very relevant to the kind of role that teachers will have to play in such contexts. Teachers will need to have knowledge of the subject matter, teaching skills, and a capacity to generate a psychological climate conducive to high quality learning (Underhill 1999). This kind of support which is so critical for learners' well-being will be even more relevant in an environment premised on more interaction between learners and machines and less between learners and teachers. A comparison can be drawn here between the responsibility of the teacher in a technology-enhanced environment, (supposing less teacher-learner interaction) and working parents who are encouraged to give their children "quality" time. Ehrman (1998), in fact, draws on the concept of holding (Winnicott 1960, 1972 cited in Ehrman 1998, 99) a term used in child psychiatry, which "represents the least level of support required for healthy development. The holder, whether caretaker of an infant or teacher of adults, must be reliable, provide soothing for infants and attention to self-esteem for adults."

Although the concept of affect in language leaning is more complex than simply promoting a good affective climate in the classroom, examining teacher-learner interaction is a good starting point to re-examining the role of affective factors in language learning. Technology will give learners what Voller (1997) calls "situational autonomy". But, it is this author's contention that learners who are used to working under teacher direction will not automatically become learners who are able and willing to assume responsibility for their own learning and ready therefore to embrace technology as one way of achieving high levels of autonomy. A certain amount of teacher scaffolding to provide both cognitive and affective support will be critical to the successful integration of technology in the curriculum.

Metacognition

The third area which this paper sees as important in enhancing the quality of student learning in foreign language education is the broad area of metacognition. Two areas of metacognition—metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies have been extensively discussed in the literature on language learning in recent times. Brown sees an important role for teachers in enhancing metacognition. This is

reflected in his call for "explicit encouragement and support for reflection upon learning processes" (Brown 1994, 147). A better understanding of the concept of metacognitive knowledge, i.e. knowledge about learning, emerges from the work of Flavell (1979); Victori (1999); Victori and Lockhart (1995); and Wenden (1986, 1991, 1998, 1999). Learner beliefs, a subset of their metacognitive knowledge, has been a prominent theme in work done by Cotterall (1995, 1999) and Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988), to cite just two educators who have been looking at the theoretical and practical implications of the beliefs that language learners hold. Carter (1999), Kern (1995), and Yang (1992) have also used the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), an instrument developed by Horwitz (1988), to look at students' beliefs in a variety of contexts ranging from Taiwan to Trinidad and Tobago.

Many commentators believe that raising learners' metacognitive awareness, by helping learners gain insight into what learning involves and insight into their own learning style is a pre-condition to the teaching of metacognitive strategies. Broady (1996), for example, contends that by helping raise learners' metacognitive awareness, teachers can help them learn how to use different learning resources and environments. Holec (1981), too, lays great store by a gradual reconditioning process that enables learners to re-examine their assumptions about language learning, and their role as learners, before engaging in any kind of strategy training in the classroom. Learners' traditional understanding of teacher and learner roles and responsibility in L2 learning often undermines teachers' efforts to make them better managers of their learning, as the following extract humorously illustrates

> I had to correct (?!) my composition today. I think that headache should be for the teacher!

> (Student journal reflection, October 1997)

Many learners are ambivalent about what they consider to be pointless ventures into learner self-management.

> Today in class I had to correct my own errors on an assignment that I did. I am a bit undecided about this exercise. I think it is a good idea because it could be used as a gauge to see how much grammar you know; but then I thought it pointless because if I know what my errors were, I would not have written them in the first place…Honestly, I did not learn anything new from this exercise except that I must check over my work more carefully because I made some very stupid mistakes. I'll blame that on nerves.

> (Student journal reflection, October 1997)

Metacognitive strategies are held to be distinct from metacognitive knowledge. These strategies are "general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate, guide their learning, i.e. planning, monitoring and evaluating" (Wenden 1999, 519). O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classic volume, Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition presents a detailed account of the role played by metacognitive as well as cognitive and socio-affective strategies in second language acquisition. Like Wenden, O'Malley and Chamot classify planning (advanced organizers, directed attention, functional planning, selective attention, self-management); monitoring (self-monitoring) and evaluation (self-evaluation) as metacognitive strategies.

It is argued that many learners do not deploy metacognitive strategies because teachers often assume responsibility for managing their learning. In the following quotation, Weinstein and Rogers (1985, cited in Wenden 1991, 13) discuss the implications of the teacher's management of the process of learning:

> Teachers try to stay in tune with their students' level of understanding by watching for subtle clues (e.g. facial expressions) and by stopping at appropriate times to ask questions in order to ascertain students' weak spots. In other words, teachers are very often much more active in the learning process than are students. While this may result in very effective teaching strategies, these teaching behaviors do not necessarily help students gain independence by developing effective comprehension-monitoring strategies of their own.

Successful students, however, learn to adopt active strategies for themselves, incorporating monitoring behaviours into their repertoire of learning skills. Less successful students apparently do not, continuing to rely on teachers for this function. This is, perhaps, why students encounter difficulty in college, where most instructors do not have the time or desire to serve this purpose for students who, by this time, are presumed to be independent learners.

Weinstein and Rogers's independent learners are most probably those who have acquired not only a capacity to assume responsibility for their own learning, but who actively engage in practising what they know. Similarly, Wenden's (1999, 529) statement that "theoretical writings about self-instruction and self-direction in language learning have identified planning, monitoring and evaluating as the skills that constitute self-directed language learning" underscores the link between the use of metacognitive strategies and self-directed learning.

Teaching learners to assume more responsibility for their learning must imply helping learners learn how to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. Learners who do not know how to deploy metacognitive strategies risk remaining dependent on their teachers to manage their learning, even in the face of the situational autonomy brought about by technology. However, if teachers wish to help learners achieve linguistic and learning autonomy, i.e. autonomy as communicators and autonomy as learners, they need to help learners learn how to perform some of their (teachers') traditional functions. In teaching learners strategies to oversee and manage their learning, teachers act as facilitators of learning, becoming less "sage on the stage" and more "guide on the side" (Tella, 1996 cited in Warschauer 1997, 478).

Learner Autonomy

As important as each of these trends might be individually, it is their integration into an approach to language learning premised on making learners more autonomous that is likely to have a far greater impact on enhancing student learning in the classroom. Learner autonomy has been described by Little (1991) as the buzzword in language learning in the 1990s and it seems set to become a mega-trend in learning in the 21st century. According to the literature on learner autonomy, autonomous learners are

those who are prepared to assume responsibility for self-directing their learning (Boud 1988; Holec 1981, 1987; Holec and Huttunen 1997; Little 1991).

What emerges clearly in the growing body of research into learner autonomy is that autonomy, especially in its initial stages, is very dependent on teacher support. Teachers who adopt a critical approach to technology; who seek to promote a positive affective climate and who enhance metacognition in their students are engaged in practices which promote the qualitative involvement of students in learning. Classrooms which encourage high quality learning and student involvement are more likely to be classrooms in which autonomy flourishes, than are classrooms where teachers retain total control of the process and motivation of learning.

Final responsibility for actualizing learner autonomy, however, rests with the learner. Although it is readily admitted that instructional practices that promote greater learner self-direction can foster the development of the capacity for autonomy, ultimately, it is the learner herself who must decide whether she will engage in practices that reflect her capacity for autonomy. In other words, however critical teacher support might be to the development of autonomy, the most influential person in autonomy remains the learner. A learner who is prepared to use the resources of the new technologies, manage her affect, and summon up her metacognitive knowledge and strategies will very likely act in an autonomous way.

Conclusion

This article has examined three current issues in language teaching and research: the integration of technology, the role of affect, and the role of metacognition. The article posited that these were three key areas that could influence the way that teachers teach and students learn foreign languages in classrooms in the present decade. While the context referred to in this article was the context of higher education, the lessons to be learnt are no less relevant to the teaching and learning of foreign languages in adolescents or adult learners. Similarly, while the examples cited referred to French language learning/teaching, most, if not all of what was written, applies equally to Spanish, the first foreign language in many institutions.

The article argued that technology, the first area discussed, must be premised on educational goals, and called for a critical approach, a principled approach, indeed, to the adoption and integration of technology. Creating the right affective climate for classroom-based acquisition and helping students understand and exploit metacognition in language learning were identified as other important research and teaching issues.

Considerable empirical evidence has been adduced to show the benefits of placing greater focus on any one of these three areas in an instructional programme. This article contends, however, that instead of keeping technology, affect, and metacognition as divergent strands, the classroom practitioner can add value to her teaching and her students' learning by weaving these strands into a coherent approach that promotes learner autonomy.

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