ICTS AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING/TEACHING

Mª Elena Gómez Parra¹ Antonio R. Raigón Rodríguezª Universidad de Córdoba

RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende hacer una revisión del trasfondo teórico y los términos lingüísticos que presupone la enseñanza de la segunda lengua que afectan, lógicamente, a la enseñanza virtual y, por tanto, a la aplicación de las Nuevas Tecnologías (NNTT) o Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TICs). Entre otras cuestiones, trataremos la diferencia entre fluidez y perfección, la aplicación de los enfoques formales (o gramaticales) y funcionales (o nocionales) o la diferencia entre adquisición y aprendizaje. Por último, haremos una breve reflexión sobre la aplicación de las TICs como métodos de enseñanza y aprendizaje, así como una aplicación práctica a modo de ejemplo.

Palabras clave: Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (*ICTs*), Lingüística, Inglés como Segunda Lengua, Aprendizaje y Enseñanza.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to review the theoretical background and linguistic terms that, involved in teaching of a second language, affect e-learning and hence, the application of the New Technologies (NNTT) or Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Among other things, we will examine the difference between fluency and accuracy, the application of formal (or grammatical) vs. functional (or notional) approaches, and the difference between acquisition and learning. Finally, we will reflect on the application of ICTs as teaching and learning methods, and we will look at a practical application as an example.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (*ICTs*), Linguistics, English as a Second Language, Learning and Teaching.

Mº Elena Gómez Parra, Dpto. de Filologías Inglesa y Alemana de la Universidad de Córdoba. Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación. Teléfono de contacto: 957 218406. Correo electrónico: ff1gopam@uco.es

Antonio R. Raigón Rodríguez, Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Córdoba

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1. INTRODUCTION

ICTs³ (also called NNTT³) has become a recurrent topic in language teaching theories nowadays, as well as a pervasive tool among teachers of English who use ICTs in their classrooms. Unfortunately, not all teachers are able to make use of these tools in their classrooms for various reasons, such as: institutional centres⁵ are not well equipped with hardware and software (not enough and not good enough quality); teachers are not trained in the use of ICTs (and often have neither the time nor the resources to acquire the relevant skills). In relation to this issue, Barker, 1993, stated:

New teachers entering classrooms in the mid 1990s and beyond must have training and skill to merge today's technologies into learning activities/strategies that will stimulate and maintain student interest, and at the same time prepare young people for the world they live in.

In addition, Education Faculties are seeking to provide novice teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to infuse technology into the education process. This is by no means an easy task! Although a great deal of progress has been made, in far too many aspects, technology is still not central to the preparation

ICTs stands for Information and Communication Technologies

⁴ NNTT stands for New Technologies

We use this umbrella term to cover all types of educational centres: primary schools, secondary schools, university faculties, language centres, etc.

experience of future teachers in most Education Faculties; technology instruction involves teaching about technology as a separate subject, not teaching with technology across the curriculum.

This overall picture does not look very optimistic (indeed it is not), but we would like to seize this opportunity to provide some hope and encouragement to those people who, in spite of all the difficulties, keep trying to incorporate new technologies into their everyday teaching method. And, what is more, we would like to provide a theoretical review to inform these teachers about the differences, possibilities and benefits that the use of *ICTs* can bring.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Our main goal, then, is to carry out a theoretical review of the topics and dichotomies that govern the terminology in Applied Linguistics in relation to Second Language Acquisition and the importance they can bring to the incorporation of *ICTs* in the classroom as enabling tools.

2.1. Opposing approaches to TEFL: accuracy vs. fluency

The second language (henceforth L2) teacher must first of all be able to provide as personal and informed an answer as possible to these two questions:

- a) Which is the authentic nature of language?
- b) Is accuracy preferable to fluency?

The answers to both these questions will direct the teacher (and his/her approach) towards a specific methodology. The history of methodology has led us through different considerations about the *accuracy-fluency* dichotomy. For the sake of clarification we will define three terms that have undergone considerable variation. Such terms are *approach*, *technique* and *method*.

Method is a concept defined by Richards and Rodgers as "an umbrella term" because it groups together some other concepts. Anthony (1963) analyzed the language teaching situation using the terms *approach*, *method* and *technique*. Later on, Richards and Rodgers⁶ (1985: 16) referred to *method* in this way:

Since we prefer *method* as an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice, we find it convenient to modify Anthony's terminology for the present purpose and speak of *approach*, *design* and *procedure*.

⁶ Gómez Parra, Mª E. & Roldán Tapia, A.R. (2004: 81): Richards and Rodgers are especially significant authors in the field of Applied Linguistics because they have organised the previously vague definitions of these concepts in a clear-cut way. This is why scholars all over the world follow and apply their definitions to new theories on Second Language Learning (2LL) and Second Language Teaching (2LT).

Approach, which is the first level of the method, is defined by Richards and Rodgers (1985: 17) as follows:

An approach defines those assumptions, beliefs, and theories about the nature of language and the nature of language learning that operate as axiomatic constructs or reference points and provide a theoretical foundation for what language teachers ultimately do with learners in classrooms.

Technique is the term that comprises the practical application of the theoretical scaffolding described here. It is a part of the **Procedure**, the third level, a term described by Richards and Rodgers (1985: 17) in the following way:

... [it] comprises the classroom techniques and practices that are consequences of particular approaches and designs.

Here is a summary of such terms:

Method (theory & practice)

Approach (theory)

Design (theory)

Procedure (practice)

The next question would be: "How do 'technologies' fit among such terms? Can *ICTs* be classified under the heading of approach, method or technique?

Our viewpoint is that technologies should be envisaged as an aid to Second Language Learning (henceforth 2LL) and Second Language Teaching (henceforth 2LT), not as an approach, a method or a technique in themselves. They should be considered as a special type of tool and their use must have the following features:

- Coherent with an approach to 2LL and 2LT
- Adequately embedded in a method
- Regulated by specific techniques of utilization

2.1.1. Traditional vs. communicative methods

The history of methods in language teaching has undergone a great number of difficulties that has made its application a little tricky for teaching professionals.

Traditional methods can be considered as all those that focused 2LL and 2LT mainly on:

- Written skills (very little speaking or listening);
- Grammar and syntax: which are considered extremely important language components (less so lexis or phonetics);

 Norm learning and teaching: they are norm-oriented, so teaching and learning are focused on accuracy rather than fluency.

Communicative methods are those that can be described with the following features:

Language is a means of conveying meaning: communication is the main goal. Communication implies the integration of the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Fluency is preferred to accuracy (for communicative aims). They are called performance-oriented.

2.1.2. Formal/grammatical vs. functional/notional

These two approaches to language learning and language teaching have contributed to a large extent to the way people have considered the nature of language, the function of language (inside or outside society) and, of course, how languages should be learnt and taught.

Formal/grammatical approaches focus on the 'form' and they understand language as a structure that can be separated from human thought; language is defined as a structure (a set of interrelated elements), which can then be analyzed, broken down and, of course, learnt piece by piece. In such approaches *accuracy*, of course, is preferred to *fluency*.

Functional/notional approaches focus on 'functions' and 'notions' and they consider language as a whole, almost inseparable from human thought. A fundamental distinction can be made:

- Functions: what people do with language.
- Notions: what language refers to.

Fluency is preferred to accuracy in these approaches.

Needless to say, the consequences of such considerations in 2LL and 2LT have been enormous, up to the point of being able to influence generations of learners and teachers, the way they confront the L2 event, and often having an impact on general considerations about factors affecting learning and teaching.

2.2. Theoretical dichotomies

This section will be devoted to the analysis of certain dichotomies that have been extremely important at classroom level and the learning/teaching processes involved there. We will then go onto analyze the influence they can have on when *ICTs* are introduced and how they can influence the way teachers teach the *L2*.

2.2.1. Competence vs. Performance

This distinction was originally made in 1964 and later, in 1965, Chomsky improved the definition of the terms.

This dichotomy deals with the difference between the native speaker's unconscious (or implicit) knowledge of language (which he termed **competence**) and the actual use of language (which he termed **performance**).

Competence comprises the parts of a formal grammar system (phonology, syntax and lexis) acquired by a native speaker during his/her childhood. This term also makes reference to the native speaker's ability not only to produce and understand utterances, but also to identify ambiguous or deviant sentences.

Performance is actually producing utterances in specific situations, and has a lot to do with memory, social conventions, personality factors, interests, etc.

Competence, thus, is an idealization of all the possibilities the speaker has and performance is the real utterances s/he can produce.

2.2.2. Usage vs. Use

Widdowson's (1978) distinction makes reference to the function of linguistic units as elements of the linguistic system, which is defined as **usage**, while **use** refers to how it functions in communication as a speech act.

The criticism of language teaching has been that it has focused on **usage**, ignoring the **use** of the units. The *Communicative Approach* has tried to change the tendency by concentrating on **use**.

2.2.3. Learning vs. Acquisition

The American linguist Stephen Krashen made a distinction between these two concepts in the renowned *Monitor Model*, a theory composed of *five hypotheses*. One of these is the *Acquisition/Learning* Hypothesis, which lies at the heart of his theory. Krashen considers **Acquisition** as the unconscious and free from guidance processes people use when they acquire their first language (henceforth *L1*). **Learning** refers to the conscious and guided study of the language. In his own words (Krashen 1982: 10):

The acquisition-learning distinction is perhaps the most fundamental of all the hypotheses...

The first way is acquisition, a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language. Language acquisition is a subconscious process. The second way to develop competence in a second language is by language

For a complete definition of the term Acquisition, see section 2.2.3.

learning. We will use the term "learning" henceforth to refer to conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them.

Krashen suggests that Acquisition is the significant process because the language we learn will be useful to us in monitoring and checking our communication.

2.2.4. Authentic vs. Restricted exposure

The type of materials used for instruction means that students are 'exposed' to a huge amount of written texts (magazines, books, articles, product labels), listening (small talk, recordings, radio programmes), and other visual input (TV programmes, Internet ads). If these materials have a 'real-life' basis, they are considered realistic materials. Then, the type of exposure is realistic. If, on the other hand, they have been simplified (or graded) to adapt to the level of the students, they are considered adapted and the exposure is restricted.

Language teaching has been dominated for some years by an 'uncontrolled passion' for authentic materials (which is a natural reaction to the previous unnatural texts of earlier materials).

2.2.5. Language-centred teaching vs. task-centred problem solving

Language-centred teaching implies a model in which knowledge is acquired in quite a passive way and the teacher was considered a lone expert. The task-based model focuses on learning through the specification of activities designed to engage learners in using the language.

This issue is interrelated with the learner -and teacher- centred approach dichotomy.

D. Nunan (1988) and N.S. Prabhu (1984) defined learner (or learning) centred instruction as that in which priority is given to the interests and needs of the learners. On the contrary, an approach is teacher-centred if such priority is given to the concerns of the teacher.

The learning approach is changing the role of the teacher. S/he is becoming:

- a creator of the learning environment
- a co-operator of the learning process
- an informed, critical and open-minded professional
- a mediator between the learners and their needs
- a fundamental component of learning success

This means that school infrastructure must be adapted, teaching resources must be re-organised (i.e. ICTs) and new roles for the different protagonists in education

(learners, parents, teachers...) have to be cast. Teachers must acquire new skills and their role should be positively re-evaluated, which means valuing and rewarding them better.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERESTING WEBSITES AND INTERACTIVE RE-SOURCES

During the 90s, second language teaching experienced the arrival of "the technological revolution". Before that time, visual aids and recordings had been common elements in foreign language classes but no one could foresee the spectacular changes that language teaching was about to undergo.

In this part of the article, we will analyze some of the most important aspects in language teaching, particularly English, in relation to *ICTs*.

Leaving aside the use of films, TV series (realia) as well as specially designed videos, the arrival of the computer to the English class has ushered in a new era, the advantages of which we are only just beginning to benefit from. We will divide this section into three parts: Internet usage, CD ROMs and the creation of interactive materials.

The Internet is a great tool for language teaching but we must prepare the material well in advance and be sure that the webpage is appropriate for children. There is no kind of censorship. Anyone can upload anything on the Internet and you have to be very careful when selecting your material. Usually official and institutional pages are the best and the people managing them are professionals. However, many private pages are also worth visiting and provide a many wonderful ideas and resources.

In addition to the more "classical" references such as Dave's ESL Café (http://www.eslcafe.com/) or La Mansión del Inglés (http://www.mansioningles.com/), there are many interesting links on the Spanish Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia webpage, and great examples on how to use ICTs in English teaching. These include Interactive English, an award-winning page created by Aurora Gil, a secondary school teacher who has done an excellent job in material creation. (http://www.cnice.mecd.es/eos/MaterialesEducativos/mem2001/ienglish/index.html).

As stated above, web pages of official institutions are commonly more reliable than private ones. Among them, BBC and the British Council (http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/learn_english/) offer a range of communicative activities and resources to enhance communicative skills: updated news followed by related activities, quizzes, downloads... You can also listen to the BBC World News. It is sometimes a fantastic idea to take your students down to the computer lab for a tour round these sites, where they can read real news and listen to actual native speakers talking. One of the basic ideas that we have discussed in the previous theoretical section is authentic vs. restricted exposure. Even though our students might not be sufficiently prepared, it is always worth trying out realia and authentic language exposure. However, we should be aware that this kind of input can hinder our students' confidence. We must tell them that it is ok if they do not understand every single word, that it is perfectly

normal. We prefer them to be fluent rather than accurate most of the time, and we always want them to communicate rather than being grammatically correct.



Another important issue is the fact that productive skills (sometimes writing, but particularly speaking) are usually left somewhat neglected in this type of exercise, if not completely abandoned. Lessons need not be entirely virtual. Our students can discuss what they have found on the Internet, they can express their opinions orally or on paper. There are sites such as <code>English Language Forum</code> (http://www.usingenglish.com) that allow interaction between students and other students or teachers. Besides the most obvious advantage of clarifying and answering questions, this webpage gives us the opportunity to interact in real-life situations with other students/teachers that share our same interests thousand miles away from us.

The Internet provides a vast quantity of resources that will improve our students' competence and communication skills. We just have to bear in mind the balance between the four skills.

Fluency and communication must be our first aim when we enter the classroom. Most would agree that accuracy is better achieved when students speak a lot. The problem is that it is sometimes very difficult to get our students to interact in a second language. There are a great many ideas on the Internet for this purpose too. You and your students can enjoy reading and performing jokes and songs. Even if the competence level of your class is not very high, you can get them started with some short jokes. Here are some examples taken from Jokes for the ESL-EFL Classroom (http://iteslj.org/c/jokes.html):

The Perfect Son

A: I have the perfect son.

B: Does he smoke?

A: No, he doesn't.

B: Does he drink whisky?

A: No, he doesn't.

B: Does he ever come home late?

A: No, he doesn't.

B: I guess you really do have the perfect son. How old is he?

A: He will be six months old next Wednesday.

SOME ABOUT DOCTORS

Patient: Doctor, I have a pain in my eye whenever I drink tea. Doctor: Take the spoon out of the mug before you drink.

Patient: Doctor! You've got to help me! Nobody ever listens to me. No one ever pays any attention to what I have to say.

Doctor: Next please!

He or she?

A: Just look at the young person with the short hair and blue jeans. Is it a boy or a girl?

B: It's a girl. She's my daughter.

A: Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know that you were her father.

B: I'm not. I'm her mother.

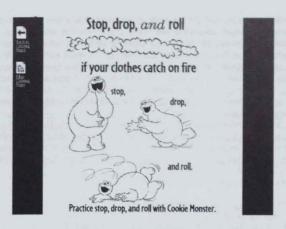
Jokes are a great way of providing short reading texts, for interaction, role playing or practising telling anecdotes. They can also use their own jokes.

We must not forget the importance of cross-curricular topics in class. The Internet provides an endless supply of materials designed for that particular purpose and gives us the opportunity to introduce different cultures in our class. A good example of this can be found in *Inglés, Culturas e Internet* by Antonio R. Roldán (2003). In this book, published by the *Conserjería de Educación y Ciencia*, the author presents a wonderful journey across the United States of America. The use of Internet resources is dovetailed with teacher-student and student-student interaction. The main character wants to travel westward from Maine, on the north east coast, to the Pacific, visiting a number of places. These places are virtually visited by the students as well. The cultural aspects available through this unit are a way of enriching our vision of this breathtaking country and casting aside a number of prejudices that are very common today. Secondary education students can learn about other cultures and get to know their own one better. This kind of activity is highly motivating and very enjoyable for our students.

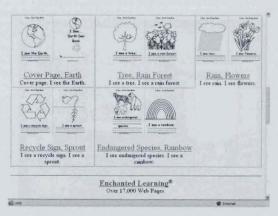
For other levels, we have found some fantastic downloadable materials in order to work globally in our English class. Primary English teachers will find a lot a worksheets and resources for their class at the Sesame Street Web Page.

(http://www.sesameworkshop.org/sesamestreet/).





Many colouring pages like this one are included, as well as very funny games and songs. In this particular example, children are taught how to behave if their clothes catch fire. For obvious reasons, this type of activities should also be present in our class since it is always a good time to be aware of our children's safety. Cross-curricular topics can be worked beautifully with little children. Another good example is the printable book about recycling called "Earth Day", which we can find in Enchanted Learning (http://www.enchantedlearning.com/books/holiday/earthday/).



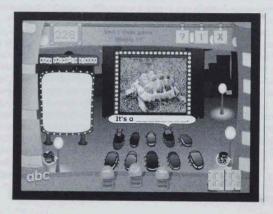
When fluency is more important than accuracy, that is, when we want production from our students, music always works like a charm. We can download classical as well as Walt Disney's midi version songs together with their lyrics. We can have a lot of fun singing along with our students. Completing this unit might be really easy with the actual movies, which they usually love. You can find these resources in *Sing along Songs* (http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/music.htm#index). There are also many pages devoted to storytelling for small children, such as *Stories for Children* (http://www.vtaide.com/png/stories.htm) or reading, e.g. *The English Club* (http://www.englishclub.com/reading/index.htm).

Apart from the Internet, *ICTs* help us in many other ways. The use of CD ROMs, often included in our students' book, should not be disregarded as a way of improving the children's skills, especially for the younger ones. The bright colours leap out from the screen, mesmerizing them. The level of motivation is spectacular and the results are usually extremely encouraging.

Some of the advantages of this resource are:

- Students can follow at different paces.
- It can be used at home.
- Students develop other skills besides linguistic ones.
- It is a nice break from everyday routine.
- It integrates different skills.
- It allows teachers to tackle the issue of diversity and support learning for students who have a different kind of intelligence.

We have chosen as an example the beautiful material created for *BUGS* by MacMillan Heinemann. This CD ROM helps the teacher in many different ways since it can be used for slow-learners, early-finishers or as a prize for good behaviour in class, in addition to revision and extension exercises.



We would also like to look at exercise creation tools. The time you dedicate to creating original material for your pupils is time well spent. Similarly, we would like to encourage all English teachers to create their own interactive material. It is easier and faster than it might seem at first, and the advantages are numerous. As well as the satisfaction of using your very own material in class, there are other aspects that we would like to highlight:

- You know your students better than anyone else.
- You know your students' needs, motivation, social context and starting point (constructivism).
- This situation involves students in their learning process and increases their motivation.
- They are free: the software is freeware and, since you do not use any paper, it is also environmental friendly.
- They can be used everywhere.

These exercises can be presented in two ways: uploaded onto the Internet or copied onto CD ROMs. Many institutions have their own sites and platforms for this purpose, e.g. the University of Cordoba's *Aula Virtual* (https://www.uco.es/aulavirtual/). The second option allows students without an Internet connection to work from home.

Exercise creation software programs include Hot Potatoes, Respondus, Textoys, Markin and Question Mark.

4. CONCLUSIONS

ICTs have become an essential tool for Second Language teachers. They allow students to gain a better understanding of subject matter, processes and situations, which are of the utmost importance when it comes to mastering the English language (in our case). Teachers must have this specific knowledge to be able to advise their students for exploration and self-learning purposes.

ICTs must fulfil the following Second Language Learning and Teaching objectives:

- They should create new concepts and procedures (not only for teachers but also for students).
- They must assist the teacher and the student with innovative measures for meaningful learning.
- They have to be able to support co-operative and collaborative projects between students and teachers or among peers.
- They should provide teachers with specific skills, according to level of schooling and technology usage.

In brief, our results show: it is a good idea to provide teachers and schools with the necessary technical equipment for professional training. This will raise their general and specific knowledge, as well as that of their community.

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