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REFLECTION BUILT ON LANGUAGING AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO FEEDBACK: DEVELOPING PROCEDURAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS OF THE CONSTRUCTIONIST NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE AND LANGUAGE AMONG PROSPECTIVE L2 LANGUAGE TEACHERS

**Reflection built on languaging as an alternative to feedback:
Developing procedural language awareness of the
constructionist nature of knowledge and language
among prospective L2 language teachers**

While teacher feedback has got a long established tradition in pedagogic or educational discourse as a form of reflection, it has to be noticed by students to result in raised awareness. Apprehension of teacher feedback depends on its various characteristics such as salience, length, complexity or linguistic features (Swain, 2006a). Thereby its value may be too much engrained in the positivist paradigm of knowledge and language. Sociocultural approaches to learning, resting firmly on constructivist theories of knowledge and interactive theories of language, underscore the centrality of the learner. The agency of the learner places reflection in the form of talks (Moate, 2011) or languaging (Swan, 2006a). The aim of this paper is to present a microgenetic analysis of languaging on the concept of “noticing” (Schmidt, 1990) in teacher training during a methodology class. The working hypothesis is the claim that reflection, in the form of substantiated thinking, presents a potential for developing procedural dimension of teacher language awareness.

Keywords: languaging, reflection, microgenesis, teacher education, constructionism, teacher awareness

Słowa kluczowe: languaging, refleksja, mikrogeneza, edukacja nauczyciela, konstrukcjonizm, świadomość nauczyciela

1. Introduction

In the Polish educational milieu, the theoretical part of teacher education is very much a CLIL type with all content teaching related to the cultural aspects of the linguistic area (Lankiewicz, 2013a). Hence L2 teacher education is mostly knowledge/awareness oriented with the expectation of being translated into pedagogical practice. The effectiveness of this transfer, however, according to Andrews (2001: 88), is conditioned by an intricate relation between teacher communication abilities and his/her subject-matter knowledge. Ministerial requirements in the form of qualification frameworks (KRR, 2011), teacher education regulations (Rozporządzenie, 2012) and methodological literature (cf. Drożdżał-Szelest, 2006), promote an autonomous and reflective type of teacher with a high level of language related knowledge and awareness.

Assuming that knowledge is the result of social and situational constructions (van Lier, 2000: 245), and that language does not reflect the world in a direct way (Evans and Green, 2006: 48), it is proposed here that reflection on the constructionist view of the world and language is a vital element of the process of raising teacher awareness. Such a stance places a challenge for teacher educators to pay more attention to the form of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983; 1987), in which the content is reflected by the form of teaching. Allowing for the mediational role of language in education, the suggestion is to develop reflectivity with recourse to the concept of languaging (Swain, 2006a) comprehended as a moment-to-moment reflection promoting student's intersubjectivity in the construction of knowledge.

The research part of this endeavor aims at presenting a microgenetic analysis of student reflectivity through the process of languaging (thinking materialized in interactional exchanges). In the research context it pertains to students' interdependent comprehension of Schmidt's (1990) theory of noticing. A working hypothesis is that reflection-in-action, in the form of thinking reified in language, presents potential for developing procedural knowledge/awareness of the prospective language teacher.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical underpinnings draw on three areas with the first one pertaining to knowledge and language as social construction. This postmodern trend in social sciences was fashioned by George Kelly's (1963) personal construct theory conceptualizing thinking and learning as a process of continual building and verification of hypotheses, as well as revision of con-

structs. With regard to world-language relations, it problematizes objectivity of the world described by language and opts for creativity of perception maintaining that “the parts of this external reality to which we have access are largely constrained by the ecological niche we have adapted to and the nature of our embodiment” (Green, 2006: 47-48; after Danilewicz, 2011: 92). While constructivism places knowledge and language in the dimension of a personal construction, proponents of social constructivism or constructionism underscore the fact that any cognitive construction takes place in a particular socio-cultural context (cf. van Lier, 2004; Lantolf, 2000). Built firmly on Vygotsky’s mediational function of language in the process of learning with reference to Leontiev’s (1978) activity theory, this sociocultural approach underpins all considerations in this article. A direct corollary is that since both language and knowledge are of a very relative nature, it is important that teacher education capitalizes on the interactional theories of language as an instrument for the social creation of meanings.

A crucial issue for further cogitation is also the notion of reflection-in-action elaborated by Schön (1983/1987), contained in the slogan “to learn by experience”. Although originally the conception accentuated the place of “reflective practicum” in teacher education, in this article it is also applied to the theoretical part of teacher education to render it more procedural (Andrews, 2001), more “know-how” oriented (Munby, 1989: 34). The platform for bridging theoretical knowledge with classroom practicality is research on teacher cognition (cf. Borg, 2006) based on the conviction that teacher behavior is conditioned by the system of assumptions and beliefs shaping his/her behavior. Hence procedural aspects of teacher pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) constitute a platform for mitigating the dissonance between practical and theoretical aspects of teacher education through reflection-in-action (Munby et. al., 2001).

In the field of L2 education, teacher cognition received an additional elaboration in the notion of teacher language awareness. Initially, it referred to the metalinguistic knowledge of grammar (Knowledge about Language – KAL), but in more recent years it has been extended to other aspects of language accentuating its practical-pedagogical dimension (Carter, 2003; Andrews, 2001; 2003; 2007). Significant in this regard is the differentiation between declarative and procedural components of teacher awareness markedly related to research on the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of the teacher (cf. Schulman, 1987). In this regard Andrews (2001: 78) points out that it “could also be argued that the unqualified application to language teaching of a generic term like PCK overlooks the uniqueness of the process of language teaching, referred to earlier, in which language is taught through

language". Thereby, assuming the correspondence between the procedural dimension of PCK and procedural teacher awareness, it is postulated that a proper use of linguistic resources by teachers and, in particular, their willingness to engage in language and knowledge-related issues may result in a more reflective approach to teacher education.

Significantly, this article debunks the role of the teacher as a feedback provider offering strategies for improvements (Gattullo, 2000). In CLIL teaching (as relevant to the present research) an essential part of teacher feedback should pertain to the content, an element frequently neglected in a traditional language class (Harmer, 2001: 101). Yet the sociocultural approach, assumed here, manifests the importance of classroom interaction and the value of students' work in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), in which students learn as much from each other as from more knowledgeable instructors. This stands in contrast to feedback oriented education dominated by reflection-on-action, with a more central role of the teacher. More importantly, it is postulated here that the post-structural vision of knowledge and language requires adequate methodology, commonly identified with the umbrella-term of autonomy. If knowledge is a product of personal construction in social interaction, then relying on teacher feedback may be too much rooted in the positivist paradigm with an attempt to offer objective truth in a propositional way. Although the value of feedback in SLA is supported by extensive research, its effectiveness depends on its various characteristics such as salience, length, complexity or the linguistic features involved (Swain, 2006a).

Lastly, the paper draws on the concept of languaging. Briefly, the meaning of the notion has been variously interpreted depending on the discipline (Lankiewicz and Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2014). In language teaching, Swain uses it to refer to the mediating function of language in the development of higher mental processes (Swain, 2006a), or "the activity of mediating cognitively complex ideas using language" (Swain and Lapkin, 2011: 104) with the learner image as "an-agent-operating-with-mediational means" (Wertsch, 1998: 26). In a sense, it stands for intra-mentality materialized in language resulting in situational negotiation with the reservation that language cannot communicate senses in a direct way (cf. Swain, 2010, 2006; Mercer and Littleton, 2007). Thus the concept of languaging – comprehended as "talking-it-through" (Swain and Lapkin 2002), "coming-to-know-while-speaking" (Swain, 2006b) and "talkscape" (Moate, 2011) may be perceived here as an alternative to teacher feedback and a way of developing procedural awareness through reflection-in-action.

3. Research objectives and hypothesis

The objective of the research has been kindled by personal observation that students seem to perceive knowledge in the positivist sense, as an objective truth to be learned or discovered through language performing the function of telementation. Such an attitude stands in sharp contrast to language teaching theories based on autonomy and postmodern interactional theories of language, which postulate the constructionist nature of both knowledge and language. Although students are exposed to many subjects in the curriculum, their PCK (Shulman, 1987) and language awareness seems to be more declarative than procedural (cf. Munby, 1989). A possible reason for such a state of affairs may be that fact that instruction is still dominated by propositional knowledge. Research on diploma paper writing may be indicative in this regard (Lankiewicz, 2013b). Assuming the post-structural approach to research on knowledge and language, as well as postmodern pedagogy accentuating the interactional dimension of language use, the present author undertakes a microgenetic analysis of classroom exchanges with the objective of pinpointing moments of reflection-in-action on the constructive nature of knowledge and language. More plainly, the interaction session is aimed to actively involve students in the process of the construction of knowledge as a collaborative activity. It is hypothesized that such an experience results in procedural awareness/knowledge since, as it is pointed out by Borg (2003), teachers have a tendency to imitate their own educational experiences in spite of contradictory evidence of PCK.

3.1. Methodology

The following research is of a qualitative nature and pertains to the microgenetic analysis of selected representative excerpts from students' interactions with the teacher, which are framed into the concept of languaging to allow for the basic activity of the learner in cognizing the world. The conception, embodying the notion of thinking mediated through language, offers opportunities for identifying moments of transition in regulating higher mental abilities – “the dynamic process of developmental change” (Wertsch and Hickman, 1987: 52). In the said case it pertains to the meaning construction and cognitive transformations exemplified in the process of languaging. Talk, or languaging, as the present author prefers to call it, with a remarkable conceptual difference, functions as a mediational tool to reform the mental makeup of the students. The changes in thinking, as they occur, are the result of reflection-in-action.

3.2. Target group

The whole research (the part analyzed here and presented elsewhere) was carried out at a private institution educating EFL teachers. The project took place during a regular methodology class of teaching English as a foreign language at the end of the fourth semester (out of 6 necessary for the completion of an undergraduate course). By the time of the research participants had been exposed to 12 hours of lectures and 24 hours of tutorials on the theory and practice of foreign language teaching with an additional 24-hour language acquisition course. Since the majority of their curriculum is covered in English, taught both by native and non-native speakers, it is classified as a CLIL course (see the related article, Lankiewicz, 2013a). The class consisted of 21 students, however, during this session of the research only 16 students were present (9 females and 7 males). Their communicative proficiency in English was oscillating around B1 and B1+ (a subjective judgment in consultation with other teachers). The students were not informed about the details of the project; however, to justify the presence of the video camera, it was mentioned that their interaction would be the subject to close scrutiny for scientific purposes.

3.3. Research description

The discursive analysis presented here constitutes an extension of the research published in *Neofilolog 41* (Lankiewicz, 2013a). The aim of the former part of the research was to delve into the mediation of academic language through the use of different talk types in CLIL methodology. It was postulated that the use of “talkscape” (Moate, 2011) helped substantiate the elaborated academic code (Bernstein 1971, 1999) with personal references and saturate concepts (content-specific language) with meaning. It was argued that the cognitive attitude characteristic of ESP methodology, as adding support “to conceptual, context-free objects of learning” (Järvinen, 2009: 167), might be less productive than ecological constructionism in the form of languaging.

Since the activities of the whole research (carried out as a regular lesson) are crucial for the understanding of the process of knowledge/awareness construction, a brief description of the former stages will elucidate the whole concept. In stage one students were asked to read 39 lines on the concept of noticing from a textbook (Harmer, 2007). This stood for raw, unmediated contact with academic language (an expert talk). Subsequently, the students were engaged in an exploratory talk pertaining to an individual understanding of the passage, followed by information pooling in pairs or groups to work out the meanings of constitutive terminology while using all possible resources such

as internet pages, books, dictionaries, etc. The central part of the research pertained to exploratory and pedagogical talks in the form of whole class interaction, the analysis of which was used to support the hypothesis. Finally, students were asked to re-read the text and write in pairs a summary of the concept under study. The submitted text indicated that despite individual differences and possible inaccuracies in the conception of noticing, classroom interaction and talk types helped re-contextualize the elaborated code and substantiate it with meaning.

Three selected excerpts from students' summaries were used during the session in the following week, and the process of languaging on the content became the foundation for pursuing objectives for the part of research presented here. They were carefully selected by the present author to trigger reflection pertaining to the constructive character of knowledge and language. During interaction, the recording of which lasted 47 minutes, the texts were displayed on the screen. The highlighted words indicated problems or inconsistencies. The texts were presented by authors to account for the voice (Eco, 2000) – personalization of academic language.

Noticing is a new **way of teaching** English. We rather **show students mistakes or repeat some of grammar issues then try teach them all the grammar structures all over again**. When we see new things and **someone gives us a simple answer about them it is easier** to understand them.

This theory modifies the theory of Krashen, not only the graded language is needed but also noticing of certain language structures. Teachers task is to make his students aware of the grammar structures in the language by emphasizing its main features. **To establish those features students should be tested on those structures**.

There is a significant difference between making students aware of a language than teaching it Teacher just shows the structure, does not explain it, students notice it. For students to notice a language structure teachers need to draw their attention i.e. by repeating some language grammar, changing the voice or simply putting it down on the blackboard, **because students not knowing the rules are not able to recognize that is correct**. Students have to be on some language level to notice new structures. Teachers should not expect immediate application of the rules by students, it takes longer time¹.

¹ Neither the summaries nor the excerpts of interactions have been annotated for mistakes.

3.4. Data analysis and discussion

As presented in the theoretical part, Swain (2006a) perceives languaging in contrast to teacher feedback which offers ready-made correction or evaluation to be internalized. Research carried out in collaboration with her colleague might indicate (Swain and Lapkin, 2002; 2011) that she treats languaging in a therapeutic way as coming to terms with one's own thinking, and presumes its self-regulatory function. Thus knowledge/awareness is the result of Vygotskian microgenesis, in which the mediatory function of language contributes to the reorganization of higher mental functions and a transformation is done within a short period of time. This requires a degree of reflection on the part of the learner. Schön's (1987) notion of reflection-in-action seems concurrent in this regard. Relating theory to practice, he criticizes academic institutions for placing "undue emphasis upon 'technical rationality' – the disciplines of knowledge and the methods that are believed to make formal, propositional knowledge reliable and valid" (Munby, 1989: 31).

The corollary of this line of thinking is that theories need their own practicalities, at least in their "technical" or methodological sense. Thus, if on the theoretical-philosophical level students are informed about the constructive nature of knowledge, and then all subject-matter is communicated in a propositional way, their awareness/knowledge may only have a declarative character. Similarly, if language is the subject of constant change, imbued with personal meanings (van Lier, 2004), why not sensitize students to this feature of language in a procedural way by experiencing it on a daily basis during class activities? Hence "the concept 'reflection-in-action' is invoked to refer to the active and non-propositional processes by which new knowing-in-action is developed" (Munby, 1989: 32). Here, not only is the subject-matter co-constructed by discourse participants, but they also realize the constructive character of knowledge and language in a metacognitive way. One more caveat is necessary before going into analytic detail. While Swain uses languaging mostly in reference to students' interaction, capitalizing on peer-peer dialogues, in this research the teacher is considered an integrative element of languaging with the reservation that he/she is eager to refrain from any judgmental statements or conclusions. They are to be worked out together. Ultimately, the agents of reflection-in-action are to be students.

This view concurs with the sociocultural approach of seeing classroom interaction by Hicks (1995). She praises an educational dialogue as a way of enhancing cognitive development since knowledge is not possessed individually but shared among community members and constructed jointly. "This implies that educational success, and failure, may be explained by the quali-

ty of educational dialogues rather than being just the result of the intrinsic capability of individual students (or the didactic presentational skill of individual teachers)" (IRF). Nonetheless, the IFR (Initiation-Response-Follow up) patterns exchanges dominating education, do not have to limit students' participation (Newman et al., 1989; Wells, 1999). This interactional paradigm does not have to be used for testing "students' ability to provide the right answers preferred by the teacher" (IRF), carried out adequately it can elicit a repertoire of other responses such as students' "reasons for holding particular opinions, and their reflective comments on their own understanding" (IRF). Thus, the follow-up element of IRF, sometimes referred to as feedback, does not have to represent only the teacher's point of view.

It needs to be noted that a significant part of the research session was very much instructional since students were to work out a deeper understanding of the concept of noticing. After the presentation (with texts in full display on the screen), collaborative enquiry was initiated by an apparently evaluative question: "Which text presented the most precise account of noticing?" At that stage students were expected to have recourse to the former session as well as their homework (to read about noticing form all possible sources). During interaction it soon became clear that the highlighted phrases or sentences were very problematic, manifesting a very idiosyncratic understanding or possibly misunderstanding of the concept. The following extract exemplifies students doubts:

- S5: "A new way of teaching" has been underlined, so there must be a problem with this sentence.
S3: What is the problem?
S6: It is not a method of teaching
T: If it is not a method, then, what is it?
S6: Approach, concept, maybe?
T; A concept of what?
S4: Way of learning, maybe that is the problem? Anyway, the second text mentions that it is a theory opposing Krashen's ideas.
T: Opposing or modifying?
S2: Modifying, it says.
T: What are the consequences for understanding the theory if we use one of the adjectives?

In the course of verbal exchange students establish, with some hints from the teacher, that in most general terms it is the theory of second language acquisition rather than a method, although it undoubtedly has some implications for teaching. In the course of the collaborative inquiry students realize that the precise use of words is essential in academic texts, yet they may be construed in

a very individual way. Consequently, related knowledge is largely constructed during social interaction. This extract may be significant in this regard:

- S9: Didn't I say that knowledge of grammar structures helps students use them?
S5: OK, but they may know grammar, I mean ... speak correct grammar, hmm ... but may not know why they use it, I mean not know the grammar rules.
S9: Well, I read on the Internet that people understand noticing in different ways.

And another excerpt from the end of the session:

- S10: So what is the sense of learning theories which are problematic? In language acquisition there so many schools and each one questions the other one just like Schmidt questions Krashen's theory?
T: What do you think? Is there one good way of understanding the process of language learning and teaching?
S3: I think, they are only partly true, and another thing is that we understand the theories in different ways. Look at the screen ... our notes are a good example of it, everybody understood it differently.
S7: Now, I would write my note in a totally different way.
T: Do you think that the underlined words are totally wrong?
S2: It depends what we mean by the words.

Students were able to notice that the core of the disagreement presented in their summaries resembled general academic disputes pertaining to the value of noticing in enhancing L2 acquisition (cf. Cross, 2002). Briefly, the problem boils down to the question of whether noticing refers to recognizing linguistic forms through enhanced input or to possessing explicit metalinguistic knowledge as indicated by Truscott (1998), or ultimately whether a part of it can be unconscious (Ellis, 1997). Certainly, classroom reflection is verbalized in a less sophisticated way in the context of pedagogical practicality:

- S1: Krashen believed that teacher must teach grammar forms one by one to make students understand input.
T: Teach or use the forms in a controlled way?
S1: No, no... only use language in a comprehensible way.
T: So, is it teaching grammar or making new grammar visible in teacher's utterances, input or speech?
S5: I guess, only use them and, for example, speak clearly and, maybe, repeat or say louder new things that the student notices.
S3: OK, by how can you notice if you do not know the grammar rule? So what is the difference between comprehensible input and noticing?

Space limitations preclude an extensive analysis here other than to cite but some illustrative examples. Nonetheless, an additional fragment elucidates students' understanding of the constructive character of knowledge and language:

S10: I am afraid I do not understand it at all.

S4: Well, to my mind it is impossible to understand it in 100 per cent. Some experts create theories and do research and others criticize it all, and in practice teachers do something else.

T: So, where is the problem?

S7: Well, maybe... I do not know, they do not understand each other, or they believe in different things. I think it is normal. Our discussion is a good example of it.

The use of languaging (thinking while speaking), pertaining to meaning being constantly shaped and reshaped, constituted a basis for reflection-in-action. The quoted excerpts demonstrate how working on a sophisticated academic theory of language acquisition resulted in microgenetic moments of reflection of a metacognitive nature. Students' professional knowing became related to the constructionist view of science (Munby, 1989: 37) since new frames received substantiation in personal experiences (Munby, 1989: 35). This way of knowing has the potential of becoming part and parcel of students' procedural awareness – eagerness to apply reflective teaching in their own career instead of communicating propositional knowledge. In a similar vein, Borg (2003) asserts that teachers' class behavior is often not dictated by literature but the experiences from their former education as well as intuition. Ironically, the concept of noticing is not supported by “exhaustive empirical research” and appears to be “based on intuition and assumption” (Cross, 2002: 2). Clearly, despite the fact that students made frequent references to the practical dimension of the theory in question, the truly implementational aspect offering more reflective insights remains beyond the focus of this article.

4. Conclusions

It might have been faster to present the theory, check its understanding and deliver corrective feedback promoting “right” understanding of the concept as it is expected by the positivist paradigm of education. Students may also have been confronted with some problems and asked to find solutions for themselves. One should not forget that discovering learning is part of the positivist

teaching, yet “knowledge to be acquired is predetermined but withheld from the learners” (Benson, 1997: 20). Alternatively, the use of languaging did not only help refrain from offering any ultimate truths on the issue under discussion, allowing for the construction of the knowledge in action, but it also had an added value of reflecting upon the nature of language and knowledge. Ultimately, students’ experience is expected to result in procedural awareness.

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