LEXICAL DEFICIENCIES AND STRATEGIES.
A NECESSARY FOCUS IN EFL TEACHING BASED ON AN ANALYSIS
OF LEARNER COMMUNICATIONS

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I. Analyses of communicative performance as a possible research methodology

We are familiar with communication analyses from the study of discourse analysis and conversational analysis, partly as a development of speech act theory. We are familiar with communication analyses from interlanguage research in which common deviations from accepted speech norms are analysed and interpreted as to their causal origins, in order to reveal psycholinguistic processes or general procedures of language users in their acquisition of foreign languages. Modelling derivations or suggestions for foreign language classroom methodology are possible, which is already evident in the incorporation of learning strategies, learning processes and learning techniques into foreign language courses (Learning English, 1995; Littlejohn, 1996).

The multitude of factors which influence success in learning – and thus affect the structuring of courses or programmes as a whole, including learning techniques or strategies – makes model building for the foreign language classroom extremely complex. Since foreign language instruction (and learning) is determined by interdependent factors, an analysis of teaching can seldom be broken down into individual factors. Every one of these factors, after all, operates simultaneously even if each of them can be described individually. The question of the effectiveness of conceptions, concepts or relatively new focal points is therefore probably put far too infrequently, despite the fact that theory-building does aim at making foreign language instruction more effective. It is only recently that some interest in research methodology of these issues has been shown (Bausch et al., 1986; Brown, 1988; Seliger et al., 1989; Johnson, 1992; Nunan, 1992). Despite these hopeful and encouraging beginnings, there is nevertheless a lack of comprehensive and detailed empirical evaluation and possibilities of testability. It seems, however, at least in view of the present lack of

better and more convincing tools in the area of foreign language classroom research, that conversational analyses of communications of learners of English at various stages of their courses or programmes would enable us to reach tentative findings about the questions of effectiveness of the various points of programme emphasis and language learning methods applied in the classroom.

II. Function of the analysis and selection of the learner communications

I would like to employ the following criteria and/or set these limits for the selection of the communication productions to be analysed, so that the function of analyses can at the same time be described.

Firstly: speech stimuli consisting of general themes and everyday situations or of speech formulations of everyday situations often involve artificial or pseudo-real situations in the EFL classroom, whereby, as a rule, the content aspect for the learner appears very obviously as a pretext for language learning. Only those conversation units will be extracted, in which theme-oriented and content-oriented speaking clearly dominate.

Secondly: The lack of empirical findings as to which themes and contents are or could be of interest for particular age groups in order to act as stimuli for speaking obviously makes a precise determination difficult, as does the selection of actual content-oriented communication phases from EFL lessons. However, when one proceeds from the notion that, in English instruction as in other school subjects, most probably an interest in themes can – perhaps even must – be aroused, so that the function of the foreign language can thus be experienced more intensively as a means of communication, then one's attention is directed to what has been called the bilingual subject studies, a model in which theme-oriented subject instruction is carried out in the foreign language. For this reason, and because theme-oriented or subject-oriented foreign language conversational competence can be observed at a very early stage of a course, it is possible to select the conversational productions to be analysed from the beginning stages of instruction in a bilingually taught subject area. The main question here should be: How successful is the mastery of a foreign language, despite the to-be-expected linguistic deficits, and what consequences are there for methodological decisions, in particular for "normal" or common EFL courses?

Thirdly: In order to make conclusions possible, it would appear to be advisable to undertake an additional analysis of an example of learner communication taken from a higher course level of a common or conventional English course. One can then proceed from the assumption that at an advanced course level in English language instruction, too, a fair degree of subject-oriented and theme-oriented speaking is possible, or at least should be, and one can thus assume advanced communicative competencies, so that methodological implications for the entire span of a course might become possible.

III. Analysis of a conversation excerpt from a bilingual history lesson

As a basis for a preliminary analysis, this study will employ the transcript of exerpts from a bilingual history lesson after three years of EFL instruction in a secondary school (Butzkamm 1997:38-41).

A. When Mohamed was born the Moslems started to count the years, like we the Christians, by saying äh from Christ's äh „Geburt" heißt?

L. (L stands for German Lehrer=Teacher) birth

A. birth we are now a thousand nine hundred ninety-one after Christ and they are ... the Moslems count around 490 or something.

L. Yes. And what do the Christians think that Jerusalem is a holy place? D.?

D. Because Christ was ... „gekreuzigt"

L. was crucified

D. Ja

L. to crucify, alright.

D. Yes

A. Yes, ähm, they have got to pray five times a day. They're praying on such a kind of carpet. And it can happen also that there are microphones or something some ... in Mecca, for example there are microphones you see. And there's a crier. He's the "Vorbeter", the?

L. The Muezzin.

L. Well, not the Moslems – there's a certain group of people and they stopped all this. They were Moslems, too. But they were not Arabs. D.?

D. The Turks äh "früher"?

L. Pardon?

D. Was heißt "früher"?

L. Earlier

D. Earlier the Turks were called

S. Seljuk

D. called

L. Seljuk Turks, yes.

N. They want to äh they want to äh "Hintergrund"?

L. in the background

N. In the background there is a mosque and äh. They want to conquer äh or to free Kuwait.

J. Yes, and the cartoon will show us the, the "absurd" (deutsche Aussprache)?

L. the absurdness

J. the absurdness

L. or absurdity

J. Yes, of the slogan or of the sentence "Make peace with war"

D. I want to say what A said. I think, I understand that this that the Allies said, "We want the war for peace". But I don't like it, the cartoon

A. Why?

D. Yes, but ... oh ... äh ... Scheiße

L. Why not, D.?

D. I think what the others said, the Allies, the Allies as the others said, it's only a pretext when they go into war, like the Crusades and that they only want to fight or so. That is it.

L. Ah. J. you think that there's a misunderstanding. Yes, please.

J. I don't think that this is the meaning of, of this cartoon, that they only want to fight or something like that. I think it's only the Al-Al-Allies?

L. The Allies. Yes, that's right.

J. The Allies who think they always thought "Yes you do a thing for peace in the world". And in the Middle East I think you can't do that with weapons and bombs. I think, yes and I ...

L. Mhm. But D., you wanted to defend your position because it is not, it hasn't become quite clear

D. I agree with this, but I think this is a "gerechter" ... "gerechter Krieg".

L. a just war

D. A just war. It is a just war, because, yes. Saddam begins the war and not the Allies and they wanted to free Kuwait and that's äh

L. That's fair

D. That's fair

L. Alright. F.

F. I think not that Saddam has ... "beginnen"

L. started

F. started the war against the Allies. They have made

L. made or started the war

F. started the first "Schuß"

L. shot

F. Shot ...

S. I think that there's no just – just war, because ... yes because in war die many people and I think the same as F. The Allies have begun the war because they

L. they fired the first shot

S. No, they "einmischen"

L. Pardon?

S. "einmischen"

L. They've got involved. They've got involved in this, to get involved

Y. I, I have really the same opinion like J.

L. I am of the same opinion.

Y. I think one couldn't say like the like he, F, that that the Allies were really the ones who began and are the ..."Sündenböcke"?

L. are the scapegoat

Y. And I think and you also couldn't say like D because I think it's better to to try to talk with Hussein. I think you have to do it with peaceful

L. means

Y. means. And it's better to do that five years ...

Y. And I think they had should tried

L. should have tried

Y. should have tried it longer when they didn't they didn't do the embargo very carefully

L. strictly

Y. strictly. But I think when – after they did all this and tried everything what this is to do to "meid" – avoid a war and when that all doesn't help they could – they must make

The overall striking feature of this conversation excerpt is the frequently occurring language shift, the proof of which is the fact that the pupils want to stick to the intentions of their statements, rather than say only what they are able to in the foreign language.

The language shift such as "... from Christ's äh 'Geburt' heißt?" and "was heißt 'früher'?" seems to be characteristic of the entire dialogue. The foreign word which is not spontaneously and immediately accessible or not available to the pupil is named in the mother tongue and queried. Upon receiving help from the teacher the word is then used by the pupil. In this way the pupil can continue the statement in the foreign language and keep the conversation going.

"Because Christ was... 'gekreuzigt'" and "He's the 'Vorbeter', the?" we have language shifts, too, with, however, two slight variations: firstly, the very fact that the word in the mother tongue has been inserted signals to the teacher that a desired and necessary intervention is called for, and secondly, the pupil doesn't take up the foreign word "crucified" which the teacher has named. The reason for this may well be that the pupil regards the statement as complete and thus considers a repetition of the word superfluous. It is clear from this that we are not dealing with a language exercise, since, if we were, we would expect the teacher to insist on a repetition of the word.

"absurd" with a German pronunciation is a variation on language shift, or perhaps rather an attempt to create an expression, which, however, happens to be the correct foreign word. It cannot be intended as a word in the mother tongue, as the word group is not appropriate. This is perhaps not a case of language shift but rather of word creation with pronunciation based on the mother tongue.

The reason for the language shift "Scheiße" (= shit) differs in this case from the previous examples. In this case the dialogue structure, which was followed up to that point, that is, the regular alternation of pupil and teacher contributions, has been broken. One statement by the pupil is followed, no doubt unexpectedly, by another pupil's interjection (in the form of a question, "why?"). Being thus unexpectedly addressed, and the pressure of having to react spontaneously brings on an emotional outburst in the form of the expletive "Scheiße". The teacher defuses the emotionally stressful situation by asking, "Why not, D?", and only after this is the pupil able to continue in a quieter tone. Language shift in this instance, according to this analysis, is not, or at least not primarily based on a lexical deficit, but rather on emotional involvement. One may speculate, at least in the context of the dialogue under discussion, and based solely on this individual case, that language shift can also occur when speakers must react unexpectedly or when they have no time to plan their speech production.

"gerechter"... "gerechter Krieg" (= "just".. "just war") as well as "beginnen" and "started the first 'Schuß'" (= "shot") are further examples of language shift caused by lexical deficits; these demonstrate that language shift is a strategic means to be able to carry forward the discussion, but – and it must be made clear at this point – only in the context of a linguistically "protected" environment in which a reversion to the mother tongue is understood.

"and are the... 'Sündenböcke'?" with the assistance of the teacher's "are the scapegoat" – and the foreign language completion of the pupil's expression "do it with peaceful" by adding "means" – indicates that both forms of help, in the mother tongue and in the foreign language, are qualitatively of equal value for the progress of the discussion, but what it also indicates is that this qualitative equality only functions in a protected environment in the particular situation of the classroom.

"to 'meid' – avoid the war" is in fact an uncompleted language shift. The pupil has produced the German word too hastily, because the English word occurs to him almost immediately thereafter. It is possible to deduce two assumptions from this: Firstly, the learner seems to be aware that it is a manifestation of a deficit compensation strategy; secondly, from a methodological point of view, one can conclude that the time factor for vocabulary activation plays an important role, so that speakers need to be given time.

Nevertheless, an over-generous allowance of language shift can reduce the efforts of the learner to seek and find the English word.

"are a scapegoat or 'Sündenböcke' because..." is proof – in fact the only proof in this particular dialogue sequence – that previously queried words such as "scapegoat" in this instance are taken up by other pupils, or at least could be. For their own satisfaction or as a learning aid for the other pupils, the German word is added. Nevertheless, this procedure can indicate that words used in a theme-oriented context can be taken up and thus perhaps more effectively retained.

In theme and subject-oriented discussion and conversations language shift and its multifarious variations appear to be a typical strategy or process, with the aid of which learners can stay on track. From a methodological point of view this process is necessary, as far as the learners are concerned.

When using texts it is conceivable that prior explanations can reduce language shift, but of course this is hardly possible in the case of open-ended dialogues. Instead, one might point to a methodological procedure₁ in which paraphrasing in the target language is possible as a compensatory strategy, which however does not occur in the text being examined here. This may indeed be the reason for the frequency of language shifts. At the same time, there are indications that a too-generous allowance of language shift encourages learners to change to the mother tongue too readily. This is a situation in which it would make sense to allow time for learners to organise their speech production. In this way, paraphrases could be employed while the search for the appropriate foreign word proceeds.

IV. Analysis of material from an EFL course at a higher level in secondary schools

To what extent theme and topic orientation in the later stages of language acquisition in traditional instruction in English is successful and whether language shift is here an equally dominant process will be demonstrated through the example of a selected communication analysis from a Grundkurs (= basic course) after eight years of EFL instruction of a grammar school class (Walter, 1991).

Thema: "Only stricter traffic laws can prevent accidents"
(S stand for Schüler = pupil; L stands for Lehrer = teacher)
S1: Cyclists, yes. In Erlangen is a very special problem. Because when I am on a red light? ...When I am standing on a red light ... heißt das Ampel? ... all the cyclists are passing and they don't look into the left side or right side, they are thinking that they are always right because they are driving in Erlangen ...Yes. Very bad moral? ... Morale...
S2: It's true. Therefore you must be much more careful as you would be when you are driving a car. In my opinion it's o.k., it's the best way to drive a bicycle because it's small and you come to school very fast if you are late...
S1: Yes, but when I am driving a car and there have passed ten, ten cyclists, so that I ... na ja, wie soll man das sagen? Was heißt denn "sich ärgern"?
L: To be angry about.
S1: Yes, when I am angry about the cyclists because they are all... they don't, don't keeping with the rules, they are driving on, on one-hand streets and passing red lights, and then I really am really

on the point that. I'm not caring any more about cyclists and I think: the next one I'll ... I'll kill, yes! Because then I'm angry...
S3: I think Petra is right. The behaviour of the cyclists in Erlangen ... very bad. And it would better for both of the sides when the ... cyclists could ...behave better...
S4: Maybe it always depends on where you are at the moment. If you sit in the car, you may be angry about the cyclists, but if you are a cyclist, you are angry about the car. But it's always the way that you are angry about the other. And maybe that's a reason, too. O.K. I must give right to the others that Erlangen is a really cyclist ... na ja ... the behaviour of the cyclists is really bad.
L: So altogether, I think people should should pay more attention to each other, think of how the other one would react so that nobody keeps to his own right and says: It's my right of way, so I take it, Erna?
S2: But I would say speed limit wouldn't change anything because nobody would watch the speed limit... because you have a wide street, you go straight on, no car, wouldn't watch your speed limit...
L: So, what could be done about it?
S4: Something...that the education of driving must be better and longer but not also be expensiver ... because...no, more expensive... because then most people never could pay. Maybe it should be the same price or lower but longer and then maybe Probeführerschein?
L: Probationary driving license
S4: Yeah
L: Now a last point of discussion. I think male drivers are very aggressive. Male drivers...men and boys driving cars... So what about giving them the driving license only when they are grown up? What about girls? Do you think they could take the driving license at 18?
S3: I often noticed that people who let you pass across the street or let you pass as a cyclist when you are at a red light or something are only women and never men. They're driving very aggressive, I think you are right, but I don't think that it would help to ... to set their age higher for them.
S1: I have not the same opinion like she because I think that some men at 18 are grown up and others at 30 are not. So you can't can't make a difference. But I think that you have to change the ... the manner of thinking.

Distinctive and noteworthy language behaviours will not be treated in order of succession or according to frequency of occurrence, but rather according to the contributions of individual learners to the dialogue.

S1 (S stands or German: Schüler = pupil)

The first pupil expresses herself in a particularly engaged manner, which is responsible for a rise in the number of errors. Her strategy is risk-taking. This strategy can only be applied if errors are not too strictly marked as errors.

She is probably aware that the vocabulary to which she has spontaneous access is limited, and that the risk of being misunderstood is high. She therefore secures her position against uncertainty by checking in the mother-tongue as to whether the foreign-language formulation fits her speech intention: "...on a red light...heißt das Ampel?" (= is that called an 'Ampel'?). A language shift occurs, following a previous fruitless attempt, in which the sought-after word turns out to be unavailable: "- .na ja, wie soll man das sagen? Was heißt

denn 'sich ärgern'?" (= well alright then, how do you say that? What is 'sich ärgern' [= get annoyed]). The fruitless search is abandoned, not without a degree of disappointment, so that language shift appears to be unavoidable.

An additional strategy in the case of word deficits is to create idiosyncratic phrases or expressions, such as "one-hand streets" or "I have not the same opinion like she".

S4

The process of creating phrases and expressions is also employed by the fourth pupil: "I must give right to the others".
Furthermore, in the middle of her statement she can rearrange her language as soon as she feels that her lexical means for a statement she has already begun are not available to her: "Erlangen is a really cyclist ... na ja... (= yes, well...)". She rearranges: "the behaviour of the cyclists is really bad".

She undertakes a kind of rearrangement, or rather, a self-correction with "expensiver ... because ... no, more expensive ... because".

She also employs the process of language shift to compensate for lexical deficits by immediately and directly asking the teacher for the foreign language equivalent of "Probeführerschein?"

S2

Finally, in respect of the conversational contributions of the second pupil within the framework of this short analysis, attention might be drawn to the fact that it is not only errors or deviations from a linguistic speech norm which permit conclusions to be drawn about language use processes, but also those formulations which are in accordance with accepted standards. Indications of this should not be ignored here:

For example, she has sufficient command of lexical means or forms, which permits a conversation to be kept going despite some grammatical and idiomatic deficiencies: Example: "it's true", or "in my opinion", or "but I would say". These interpolations appear to have been employed automatically and therefore allow time for thinking ahead about the subsequent formulations.

V. Orientations for EFL instruction: Lexical Focus

Language shift in several variations, as a strategy for avoiding the pressure to abandon a communicative plan occurs, in the case of a content-oriented communication within a bilingual subject (= history lesson), at an earlier stage of language acquisition, than in the case of a course of English instruction in its final stage. From the material presented one might deduce that language shift decreases in the course of language acquisition. At the same time it should be noted that an over-generous tolerance of language shift can also lead to a too-frequent and over-hasty application of this strategy.

The abatement of language shift in the thirteenth school year does not mean that lexical deficits no longer occur. Rather, these are increasingly compensated for with the aid of

paraphrases, rearrangements in the middle of a sentence, and also inventing words or variously justifiable creations of phrases and expressions. These strategies are called "elaboration strategies" (van Dijk et al., 1983), for which, however, there have been as yet no empirical studies in the field of second language acquisition research into this displacement or development of points of emphasis of preferred strategies. From a methodological perspective, information on this point would not be amiss, since the systematic acquisition of communicative strategies might then perhaps be arranged in some form of progression.

Learners become aware of lexical deficits which are perceived as a possible danger to communicative goals. In contradistinction to this practical teaching does not sufficiently take this into consideration. The following report and empirical findings stem from actual experience (Kahl 1990:234): "Pupils constantly make serious grammatical errors. We therefore have proper grammar lessons, so that form and structure can be thoroughly practised". This feedback is confirmed by empirical findings (Zimmermann 1984:31), which prove that almost 80% of some 1300 teachers surveyed tended to implement a systematic presentation of grammar. This is supported by the fact that grammar teaching takes up almost 60% of total instruction time in all EFL classrooms together (Zimmermann, 1984:31). Hence one can conclude that for successful communication it is of particular importance to place emphasis in a course on the acquisition of lexemes, word-formations, lexicosematic units, collocations, routines and formulae or lexical phrases. These could in part be facilitated without structural analysis, so that the grammatical instruction elements are reduced. For example, sentences or utterances such as *would you like a cup of* tea in the sense of a pragmatic illocution as *offering,* but not as a conditional, could be imparted. In the same way delexicalised words can operate as *pattern generators*. Example: *to take: to take the car, to take the exam, to take more risks, it took over an hour, who takes the children to school,* etc. In this context one can also speak of a *grammaticalised lexis,* whereby the proportion of *lexicalised grammar* for foreign language courses is reduced (Lewis, 1994). "Many grammar mistakes are caused by lexical deficiency ... The lexical approach is not a revolution, but it is, I hope, a radical and helpful change of emphasis." (Lewis, 1994:193)

What needs to be especially brought to the fore, according to the signals from communication analysis, is the methodological necessity to allow a wider scope to formulae and routines as so-called *islands of reliability.* For in terms of communicative aspects it is possible to make communication easier and gain planning time by the use of automatised language. This serves the learner as a safe plateau.

If one observes the link between fact-based subjects or themes and language acquisition and/or content-relevant communication and language acquisition in foreign language instruction, the following considerations become apparent in respect to the retention and availability of lexis:

The storage-model of the memory with separate processing storages, called the multi-storage model with ultra-short span, short span and long span storage, has in the meantime been criticised from the standpoint of memory psychology and at least partly rejected, because the concept of separate storages as serial storages which cut in one after the other does not allow for parallel processes or recursions. In its place the processing depth model

has come to the fore (Craik et al., 1972). The successful acquisition of knowledge and skills is seen as dependent on processing depth.

In this respect, semantic processing would seem to play an important role in processing depth. This implies that formal, orthographic and phonological processes provide a less intensive depth of retention than semantic processes (Bird, 1976). Certainly, what is evident here independently of the favouring of one or another model, is the general agreement that retention is in the first instance semantically oriented and organised, since in the storage model long-term memory is also called the semantic memory (Rohrer, 1978:64;).

The procedures which lead to deeper processing are, in terms of cognitive psychology, generally determined by the fact that a learning task or a learning object should be interesting and motivating. For EFL instruction this could mean that the extent of involvement and identification is promoted by using relevant content and materials. In a bilingual "factual subject" (see above) the processing of theme-oriented factual content in which the learner already has some interest or in which interest can be aroused, must be placed in the foreground, so that semantic processing depth can be made possible.

Emphasis would thus be laid on the processing of speech forms only when problems in and with the foreign language restrict semantic processing. The question – and in our context this must be conceded – as to how deep processing promotes language acquisition remains open, as far as learning theory is concerned. Since, however, in a bilingual "factual" subject (here history), content has the potential to stimulate greater interest and thus greater involvement among learners, one might be able to assume deeper content processing. Deeper content processing in the combination of content-based and language work brings with it deeper language processing, since this general connection has in the meantime been confirmed by research into the mental lexicon as a possibility or strategy for intensifying the accessibility of vocabulary (Beheydt, 1987; Lawson et al., 1996; Sternberg, 1987). A reference to this can be found in our communication analysis, where a word that is queried is seen as relevant or indispensable for the content of the conversational contribution and is later picked up and used by another learner.

Accordingly it is possible to suggest the securing and consolidation of new vocabulary by using it in relevant contextual connections and facilitating learners' tasks through theme-related practice. In this way the revision of the subject-matter can be more relevant for learners than practising vocabulary, given that learners are of course informed of the necessity and the aims of a revision phase applied in this way. Thus the subject matter itself becomes a strong linking element which provides support to the memory.

Finally one might mention that reflection on language is also a content-based topic, independently of the fact that exercises for language acquisition, on and with language are still necessary. Such a topic could include, for example, the analysis of classroom conversations and communicative sequences, in the same way as theme and basis for this paper have been presented, in order that the quality of foreign language competence may be consciously improved. In this way the concept of *awareness raising*, which has increasingly moved into the methodological limelight in recent years, can be put into practice (Dam, 1995; van Lier, 1996; James et al., 1991). In this way, too, psychological and conscious links of learners to their own language learning can be established (Little, 1991), whereby learners actually delineate their own thematic framework with their language learning procedures.

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