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The Canadian Modern Language Review / La revue canadienne des langues vivantes, Volume 61, Number 3, March / mars 2005, pp. 325-353 (Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press
DOI: 10.1353/cml.2005.0016



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Rethinking Communicative Language Teaching: A Focus on Access to Fluency

Elizabeth Gatbonton
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Abstract: Although most teachers claim to practise communicative language teaching (CLT), many do not genuinely do so. In this paper, we examine some of the reasons for teachers' resistance to CLT use. We provide a theoretical analysis that focuses on one of the greatest challenges facing CLT methodology – how to promote automatic fluency within this framework. We meet this challenge by proposing a CLT methodology designed to meet specific criteria that will enhance learners' fluency, while addressing teachers' commonly held reservations about CLT. The assumptions and design criteria of the methodology presented here can be operationalized for research purposes, allowing CLT to be evaluated in systematic outcome testing.

Résumé : Bien que la plupart des enseignants disent mettre en pratique l'enseignement communicatif des langues, beaucoup parmi eux ne le font pas véritablement. Dans ce étude, on examine quelques-unes des causes de cette résistance à l'égard de l'enseignement communicatif des langues. Dans une analyse théorique, on met l'accent sur un des plus grands défis pour une méthodologie d'enseignement communicatif des langues – comment promouvoir une facilité automatique dans une langue seconde. On relève le défi en proposant une méthodologie d'enseignement communicatif des langues conçue selon des critères spécifiques qui améliorent la facilité des apprenants en même temps qu'ils répondent aux réticences envers l'enseignement communicatif souvent exprimées par les enseignants de langues secondes. Les hypothèses et les critères qui forment cette méthodologie peuvent être opérationnalisés, permettant l'évaluation systématique de la méthodologie dans un programme de recherche sur les résultats.

Although most second language (L2) teachers today claim to use a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, genuinely communicative classrooms still seem to be in the minority. This is clear from reports of CLT practices from around the world (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; D. Li, 1998; X. Li, 1984; Nunan, 1987; Sato &

Kleinsasser, 1999). These reports show that many teachers' claims of using CLT are often unsupported by actual classroom events. When observed, these teachers are found to spend more time giving grammatical explanations and encouraging rule application than conducting role-plays, games, puzzles, and conversations. This reluctance to use CLT, despite acknowledging its value, raises important questions about what, if anything, discourages teachers from using CLT and what can be done about it.

This article first explores possible reasons for this reluctance to use CLT. It then outlines and illustrates with a concrete example a teaching methodology that addresses teachers' objections to CLT by making the promotion of automatic fluency the central aim. Automatic fluency is defined here as the smooth and rapid production of utterances, without undue hesitations and pauses, that results from constant use and repetitive practice. Traditionally, techniques for promoting automaticity have included pattern practice and drill, but these have come to be seen as incompatible with communicatively oriented approaches. We suggest how this 'incompatibility' can be resolved.

Teachers' use of traditional approaches

Resistance to CLT may be due to the many unresolved issues about CLT. More than 10 years after it was first launched, fundamental issues, such as what 'communicative' means, still provoked debate (R. Ellis, 1982; Harmer, 1982). Today, 'communicative' continues to refer to activities ranging from role-plays and games, where the communicative nature is obvious, to drills, where the communicative content is less obvious. Interestingly, nearly 20 years after CLT was first introduced, a special issue of *Applied Linguistics* was devoted to further examining the concept of communicative competence, underscoring ongoing concerns about CLT (among the contributors were Hymes, 1989; and Widdowson, 1989). Even more recently, Thompson (1996) attributed teachers' tight adherence to traditional practices to 'misconceptions about CLT.'

Teachers' beliefs are often incompatible with those espoused in CLT (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; D. Li, 1998), and this may affect their ability to embrace the approach. Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) found that claims by Australian teachers of Japanese to be fulfilling their government-mandated use of CLT were not, in fact, supported by what they actually did. Sato and Kleinsasser found a significant negative correlation between these teachers' beliefs in the value of grammar teaching and the frequency with which they employed CLT. Similarly, Borg (1999) found that ESL teachers' beliefs determined to a large extent their frequency of

use of grammatical terminology in the classroom. In a study of ESL student teachers, Miller and Aldred (2000) found that teachers schooled in teacher-centred classrooms maintained beliefs and attitudes that made it difficult for them to embrace CLT.

Perhaps a more serious reason for CLT's failure to easily attract advocates is that many teachers have difficulty seeing the learning value of communication activities. Teachers in many parts of the world are used to highly structured activities such as teaching grammar rules, conducting drills, and teaching vocabulary lists, which makes it hard for them to accept that activities such as games, role-plays, and problem solving with little obvious language teaching purpose can actually count as 'real teaching.' X. Li (1984) suggested this to be the primary reason why Chinese teachers hesitated to use CLT when it was first introduced in China. A comment by a participant at a recent workshop given by the first author in Japan captured this same concern:

After doing a role-play or a game and I try to summarize what I have taught, I have difficulty coming up with anything tangible. In contrast, after teaching grammar, I know that I have given my students something really concrete about the language, something that later they can go home to study and memorize.

Clearly, 'real' teaching for this teacher meant giving students something concrete and tangible to go home with. Unfortunately, CLT has not evolved to explicitly include this goal. Ever since its inception, the main concern of CLT had been simply to expose students to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), interpreted widely to mean having students use language in genuine interactions. More recently, CLT has expanded to include some focus on language structures through corrective feedback (Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Long, 1991; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Nassaji, 1999). However, even this innovation has not succeeded in changing many teachers' perception that CLT provides little that is concrete and tangible for students. Nowhere is this more evident than in CLT's approach to fluency. Although one component of fluency is automatic, smooth, and rapid language use, there are no provisions in current CLT methodologies to promote language use to a high level of mastery through repetitive practice. In fact, focused practice continues to be seen as inimical to the inherently open and unpredictable nature of communicative activities. Thus, when teachers believe that learning has reached the point where reinforcement of new forms through practice is necessary, they tend to revert to non-communicative means for attaining this end (such as pattern practice).

The principal goal of this article is to propose a CLT methodology designed to promote automatization without jeopardizing its communicative nature. We present a specific approach to show not only how communicatively based automatization can work in principle, but also how other means of promoting learning (e.g., explicit explanation of and practice of forms) can be integrated into a CLT framework without undermining its communicative character. We also highlight the assumed cognitive underpinnings of the methodology with a view to helping close a gap that now exists between basic research on the theory of language learning and instruction and its practice.¹

The proposed approach to CLT is illustrated by examining one concrete learning task in detail – a task called Family Relationship (henceforth FAMILY). The module is aimed at learners at near beginner level in the target language; however, the principles it illustrates can be used with learners both below and above this level. In this module, the class is divided into two (or more) groups of eight to 10 students. Each group is asked to pretend to be one family. Its members are asked to decide how they are related to one another and to draw a family tree to record the relationship. Later, groups are asked to explain their family's structure to individual members of the other groups and to present their family tree to the whole class.

The following section presents the proposed methodology, referring to the FAMILY task to illustrate its specific features. We begin by describing its overall design, focusing on the various teaching stages involved within its framework and on the criteria guiding the design of the activities at each stage. We discuss core issues regarding the methodology, including instructional content, automatization, features that engender learning, teacher's role in the lesson, and use of the methodology in teaching different skills and different levels of students. We conclude with a section placing issues raised by this methodology into a larger context.

The ACCESS methodology

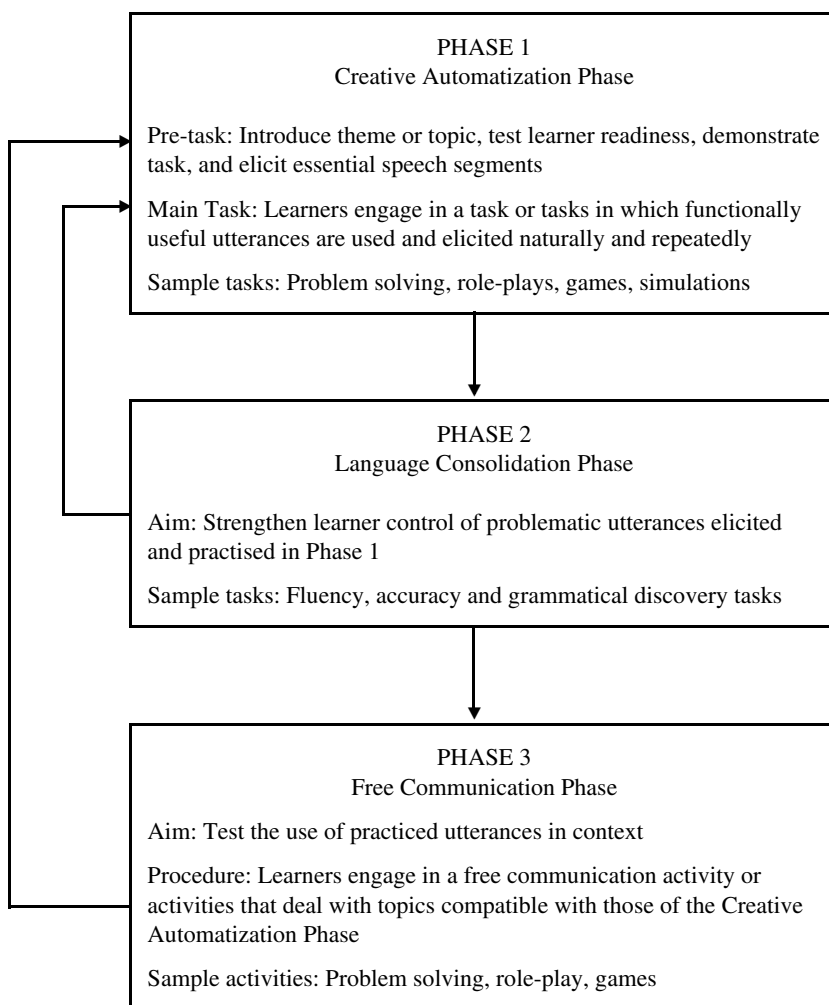
For ease of identification, the proposed methodology is called ACCESS. This acronym stands for Automatization in Communicative Contexts of Essential Speech Segments, and it captures the major elements of the approach. *Essential Speech Segments* refers to the targeted set of utterances that students can go home with after every lesson. ACCESS ensures that these essential speech segments are elicited and practised (hence, *Automatization*) in genuinely *Communicative Contexts* so they can

be produced with greater accuracy and fluency. Figure 1 shows the various components of a typical ACCESS lesson.

Figure 1 shows that ACCESS lessons have three phases – a Creative Automatization Phase, a Language Consolidation Phase, and a Free Communication Phase. The Creative Automatization Phase leads into the Language Consolidation Phase, which in turn leads into the Free

FIGURE 1

Schematic outline of the ACCESS methodology, showing the three principal phases and their sequencing



Communication Phase. The temporal sequencing between the Creative Automatization and Language Consolidation phases allows alternating between the two phases.

Creative Automatization Phase

The Creative Automatization Phase is designed to be both communicative and capable of promoting automatic fluency (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 1988). It consists of two parts – a Pre-task and a Main Task.

Pre-task

The Pre-task is a short, communicative activity designed to test whether students have the minimal linguistic resources needed to start the Main Task for the FAMILY task described above. This means having a few expressions for naming members of the nuclear family (e.g., *father, mother*), as well as describing positions in a genealogical tree (e.g., *— is my father, I am his —*). Students' knowledge of these expressions is checked using a sheet containing individual photos of four or five people who could be members of the same family. Students are asked to look at the pictures and identify who they think is the father, the mother, the son, and so forth. If they do possess the start-up utterances for this task, the teacher proceeds to the Main Task. If not (e.g., the students stammer, cannot find the right words, and/or make pronunciation and/or grammatical errors), the teacher provides these basic expressions and/or helps students to correctly and appropriately produce the ones they are attempting. The Pre-task is not directed toward ensuring that students learn *every* utterance needed for the Main Task, but rather, only the few needed in order to get started. The Pre-task, then, has two goals: diagnostic (to ascertain that students have the language resources to start the activity) and pedagogic (to assist students in acquiring these start-up expressions, if needed).

Main Task

The Main Task consists of communication activities whose goals are achievable primarily through the collaborative efforts of students working in pairs or in groups. The Main Task activity can be short (the length of a one-hour lesson) or long (spanning several lessons), or it can be a series of short self-contained tasks completed in one or more lessons tied together by a common theme. The Main Task in FAMILY is a communication activity, conducted in three stages. In Stage 1, the students

create a pretend family consisting of the members arbitrarily assigned to them (Role-Play). In Stage 2, they find out how the other group has organized itself into a family (Interview). Finally, in Stage 3, students report the results of their interviews to the class and provide an opportunity for the group they interviewed to verify or correct the information they have presented (Presentation).

To ensure that the Creative Automatization Phase promotes the learning, use, and practice of the essential speech segments, three criteria govern the design of the Main Task: Activities of the Main Task must be genuinely communicative, inherently repetitive, and functionally formulaic.

Genuinely communicative

An activity is genuinely communicative if it involves at least two participants working together to complete a task by exchanging information possessed by one and not the other. Two requirements for genuineness of communication are implied in this definition. First, new information must pass from one interlocutor to the other (an '*info gap*' is filled), and the solicited information must be crucial for the continuation of the assigned task (the information sought and passed on must genuinely be needed for later communication). Many communication activities traditionally used in CLT easily meet the *info gap-filling* requirement but not the *genuine need* requirement. A frequently used interactive task called 'Find Someone Who' is a case in point. Typically, students are given a sheet of paper containing 'Find Someone Who' instructions: Find someone who (a) was born before 1975, (b) was born in Paris, (c) did not speak French before age six, and so forth. Students interview their classmates, find the missing information (e.g., *Where were you born? Were you born in 1975?*), and record the information on the sheets. Undoubtedly, the students fill info gaps through the questions they pose. There is, however, nothing in the activity itself that suggests that the students genuinely need the information sought. Students carry out the task simply because they have been asked to do so. Thus, this task is communicative only in the info gap sense. The task can, however, be made communicative in the genuine need sense by introducing an overall goal, such as finding out what the students have in common (e.g., Do they all belong to the same generation because they were all born before 1975? Do they have similar linguistic backgrounds and birthplaces?). With this mandate, the students ask questions, not only to fill in the blanks in their 'Find Someone Who' sheet, but also to answer a larger question, such as who shares similar backgrounds.

In FAMILY, the Role-Play (stage 1) is genuinely communicative. Here, group members freely decide the relationship they want to portray. Past experience in conducting this activity indicates that learners delight in choosing their roles. Some choose conventional roles (*I am your daughter.*). Others choose less usual ones (*I am X's son from a former marriage.*), and some are very creative (*I am your ex-husband's long-lost son.*). Precisely because the students themselves determine these relationships, the information they give is new. Moreover, all the information given is needed to constitute the pretend family. The Interview (Stage 2) is also genuinely communicative. The interviewers seek information about how the other group has organized its family, information they could not know because they were not present when the relationships were decided upon. Again, students will need this information later in order to explain the other group's family structure to the whole class (Presentation, Stage 3). Thus, each stage of the FAMILY Main Task is communicative in the two important ways described above.

From a cognitive point of view, the important point is that the learner is motivated to create an elaborated mental context based on memories of the process of obtaining the new information. Representations of the utterances used and heard become embedded in these memories, which later serve as retrieval routes for accessing the learned utterances. At that later time, when the learned utterances are required in a new communicative situation, the mental state elicited will strongly resemble ones existing during the original learning activity (e.g., learners will share such features as asking about family relationship information, coordinating different bits of family relationship information to create a fragment of a family tree, juggling other pieces of information from different people at the same time, etc.). In this sense, this type of genuinely communicative learning activity strongly provides for learning under transfer-appropriate processing conditions, conditions known to greatly facilitate memory retrieval (Roediger & Guynn, 1996).

Inherently repetitive

The second criterion for Main Task activities is that they be inherently repetitive; that is, repetition is the means by which the activity goal is attained. In FAMILY, for example, the students can complete their family tree only after all members of the group have individually declared their roles, which requires repeating essential utterances to each other many times. Likewise, in the next stage, the interviewers can draw the family tree of the other group only after gathering information

about each person's role from a family member. Here, too, repetition is necessary for gathering the information needed to reach the goal. From a psychological perspective, because of the high consistency of situation-utterance correspondences across the repeated events, this repetition will lead to automaticity in both reception and production (Schneider & Chein, 2003).

Functionally formulaic

The final design criterion for Main Task activities is that they be functionally formulaic. The activities must lead to the use of utterances that have clear pragmatic functions (be useful in real world communication) and that have high re-use potential, either verbatim or with only slight modifications. This two-fold design criterion requires that the activity elicit not only those utterances directly expressing a particular language function (the function-carrying utterances) but also other utterances typically associated with them in real communication (associated utterances). For example, an ACCESS task on making requests must not only elicit utterances that express directly the function focused upon such as *Can you come and check my fridge?* It must also elicit other expressions likely to accompany the function-carrying words in real communication, such as *When do you want me to come and check it?*

The Main Task of FAMILY is functionally formulaic in that the utterances elicited are useful in fulfilling a function likely to be needed by any speaker outside the classroom, namely, introducing one's family and describing relationships. Because these utterances are multi-word constructions, produced almost verbatim each time they are used, they can be considered formulaic on the basis of an important criterion described in the literature – 'fixedness of structure' (Wray, 2002). Finally, performance of this task elicits not just one or two of these function-carrying utterances but a whole set – one for each relationship expressed – and is accompanied by numerous associated utterances such as *I am married to _____, I have two kids, How are you related to _____?* and variants thereof.

Language Consolidation Phase

The Language Consolidation Phase provides the teacher with an opportunity to formally focus attention on some specific utterances used in earlier phases. Having closely monitored the students' earlier performance with these utterances, the teacher determines the necessity, timing and duration, and type of language focus tasks to be undertaken

in this phase. One example of a language consolidation task in FAMILY is a two-part activity focusing on improving the mastery of two ways of expressing possession (e.g., *Elly is the wife of John* vs. *Elly is John's wife*). In the first part, the students are given a sheet of paper containing pictures of people who could be members of three possible families. They are asked to decide on the basis of people's appearances and names who is who in which family. In the second part, a grammar task leads the students to notice the formal features of possession utterances used earlier. Here, the teacher first leads the students to notice the common and distinguishing features of the two sets of utterances. Later, he or she leads students to abstract from these the rule governing the structure of possessive utterances (e.g., use of 'apostrophes' and the use of the phrase '... of the ...').

Such activities are usually associated with more traditional teaching (Brown, 2001) rather than with CLT. However, in ACCESS, there is a role for these and other types of form-focused activities (e.g., pronunciation practice, practice on intonation and rhythm) as long as two conditions are respected. First, the activities must aim to improve students' knowledge of the targeted utterances; second, the activities must be conducted on utterances that students have already used or attempted to use communicatively earlier. Note, however, that the Language Consolidation Phase can be bypassed if it is not really needed or enhanced if it is, depending on student performance in the previous communicative phase.

This two-part illustrative exercise is not the only possible language focus exercise. Exercises focusing on gender concordance between possessed and possessor (*Celia is not Peter's sister. Julia is his sister.*) or number concordance (*These are my brothers.*) could also be targeted. Note that in FAMILY, the language consolidation tasks are conducted *after* the Main Task. However, as illustrated in Figure 1, these can be inserted at other points during the Main Task, depending on student difficulties. The goals of the Language Consolidation Phase can include any or all of the following: *fluency* (to promote smooth and rapid production), *accuracy* (to promote error-free production), or *grammatical knowledge* (to promote knowledge of the system underlying the utterances in focus).

In recent years, researchers have called attention to the usefulness of tasks that engage students in discussions about the forms of their sentences. These tasks include language awareness activities such as the dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1990) used by Swain and Lapkin (1995) and grammar tasks (Fotos & Ellis, 1991). In dictogloss, students first hear a short paragraph at a normal pace and later work in pairs to reconstruct

it. Swain and Lapkin (1995) showed that in reconstructing the paragraph, learners focus not only on content but also on the form of the utterances. They suggested that these form-oriented discussions can result in fine-tuning students' knowledge about the target language. The dictogloss and other communicative-based grammar tasks (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2000) can be used in the Language Consolidation Phase if they are designed to focus on utterances used or attempted frequently in the Creative Automatization Phase.

Free Communication Phase

The final Free Communication Phase is designed to promote the use of essential speech segments in a more open context by providing students with opportunities to speak freely about issues related to the module's theme. Although students are free to express their own communicative intentions in the Creative Automatization Phase, they are constrained by the nature of the activity to a limited aspect of the topic. This restriction is deliberately imposed in order to produce a predictable range of utterances. In contrast, in the Free Communication Phase, students are encouraged to talk about the topic broadly and to express ideas that are not necessarily predictable. FAMILY accomplishes this by having students discuss and compare the structures of the families they have created. Another example of a final communication activity for this module might involve discussing the case of a grandmother agreeing to be a surrogate mother for her daughter. This topic invariably leads to a discussion that is considerably open and wide-ranging and at the same time permits the recycling of the essential speech segments of the earlier communication tasks.

In sum, ACCESS promotes learning and practice through communicative activities in two communication phases – the Creative Automatization and Free Communication phases. To promote the goals of initiating and sustaining automatization, the Creative Automatization Phase must conform to the three design criteria of being genuinely communicative, inherently repetitive, and formulaic. To promote the goal of fostering freer use of essential speech segments, the Free Communication Phase needs only meet the genuine communicative criterion. Together, the two phases allow for restricted and free communication tasks within a single framework, making it possible to adapt many communication activities available on the market today. Some of these materials already meet the design criteria for promoting automaticity, or, if necessary, they can easily be redesigned to do so. Appendix 1

presents an example of a commonly used language learning activity – the Job Interview – that has been redesigned from the ACCESS perspective.

Core issues in ACCESS

Before proceeding, it is useful to examine in detail core pedagogical issues in ACCESS. Such an examination will help to highlight how this approach to CLT can overcome some of the objections referred to in the introduction and will clarify how the approach can be implemented in practice. What is the content of teaching in ACCESS? What is the general nature of the teaching process involved? How is automatization promoted? Is there a place for so-called traditional teaching? What role do teachers play in the process? Can the methodology be used for learners at different levels and for promoting skills other than speaking?

Contents of teaching

ACCESS targets the teaching of specific exemplars of language or utterances typically required in specific communication situations. Each utterance is learned for its own sake, as a tool to express a particular intention. It is learned within a genuine context, in the presence of associated utterances that typically support the expression of a given intention. The focus on such utterances begins in the Creative Automatization Phase, where these utterances emerge for the first time; continues into the Consolidation Phase, where they are practised and examined in greater detail; and persists throughout the Free Communication Phase, where freer use is encouraged. As a result of this consistent focus, students not only learn the form-meaning correspondence for each utterance; they also discover how it is used along with and in relation to other utterances, how its form changes as situations change, and what alternative utterances can be used in its stead in a given situation. At the day's end, the appropriate pedagogical question is not how many grammar rules have been learned but how many useful, reusable utterances students can produce fluently, accurately, and appropriately.

Utterances-based approach

Because of the strong focus on utterances, ACCESS is an utterance-based teaching approach. There is precedent for such a focus. In the history of language teaching, two trends have either alternated or run in parallel with regard to the primary content of teaching (Howatt, 1984). One

trend sees grammatical rules – the underlying language system – as primary; the other sees utterances and texts – items or exemplars – as primary. Most language teachers have followed the first trend. But some have focused directly on teaching utterances for their own sake before talking about structures, if at all. For example, Prendergast's (1821–1866) mastery method was based on the idea that students should first learn well a small set of utterances that, once fully memorized, would lead to the construction of new and novel utterances (Howatt, 1984; Tickoo, 1986). The popular phrase-book method of Berlitz is built on a similar idea. However, the similarity between ACCESS and the Prendergast and Berlitz methods ends with their shared focus on learnable sets of utterances. Prendergast's targeted utterances were artificially constructed to pack in a great deal of linguistic information that could be unravelled by learners as their competence with the language grew. In contrast, ACCESS utterances are chosen for their functional currency in fulfilling communicative functions. The Berlitz method resembles ACCESS in choosing utterances for their functionality. However, Berlitz focuses only on basic utterances, such as those needed for travel and tourism. More importantly, Berlitz does not employ anything similar to the creative automatization process.

The teaching process in ACCESS

Teaching in the proposed ACCESS approach to CLT involves assigning students to communicative tasks, observing them carry out these tasks, and checking that they have the linguistic resources to complete them. Prompting and making use of sociolinguistically authentic interventions (e.g., recasts, repetitions, confirmation checks, and elicitions) are some of the corrective feedback measures used to enhance language development. These are delivered at opportune moments, for example, during the teacher's frequent visits to students working in groups. During these visits, the teacher checks how well students are using the essential speech segments by asking questions relevant to the task. If students exhibit inaccuracies (e.g., they say *Mara my mother.*), the teacher recasts (e.g., *Mara is your mother?*), elicits (e.g., *Who is Mara?*), or negotiates the correct form (e.g., *Do you mean, Mara is your mother?*). A distinction can be made here between the targeted utterances (function-carrying utterances and their associated utterances) and all others used in the communication exchange. In the approach proposed here, teachers would give feedback only on targeted utterances. If inaccuracies were to occur in non-targeted utterances, these would be ignored for the moment, as long as comprehension would not be impeded. This

selective focus prevents the kind of over-correction that negatively affects student motivation and also ensures keeping the learning goals of a particular activity on track.

For learning to occur in ACCESS, students must be encouraged to use full utterances as opposed to short one- or two-word answers. Although this may lessen the authenticity of the classroom exchange, it is pedagogically necessary. Studies of classroom processes have indicated that even learners in truly communicative classrooms (e.g., in immersion) can get by without using full utterances (Swain, 1993). Although single-word responses allow learners to achieve communicative goals (Swain, 1988), the exclusive or even predominant use of one-word responses prevents learners from experiencing opportunities to improve their control of language. Moreover, single-word responses can also mask linguistic inadequacies and give the false impression that learners possess higher levels of language proficiency/mastery than they actually have. One consequence of this false impression is that teachers are less vigilant in challenging learners to improve their language. Leading learners to attempt full utterances pushes them beyond mapping words onto intentions and gets them to formulate the structure needed for delivering the words within the utterances. This idea accords well with Swain's (1993, 2000) output hypothesis, which suggests that learners' need to formulate well-structured utterances in genuine conversation drives them to improve mastery of the underlying system.

In summary, the ACCESS teaching process involves helping students master utterances not yet under control, as revealed in students' speech during genuine communication activities. Teacher intervention is immediate and need-specific, and focuses on helping students express intentions at the moment of need, allowing students to make associations between the targeted utterances and the intentions they can express through them (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Lightbown, 1998; Long, 1991). The result is a truly student-centred approach. Although the teacher determines the complete set of utterances targeted in a lesson, it is the students' immediate needs, as determined by their engagement in a task, that dictate which utterances are to be learned and when.

Automatization of utterances

The ultimate goal of ACCESS is to promote fluency and accuracy while retaining the benefits of the communicative approach. In ACCESS, this is accomplished by promoting the *automatization* of essential speech segments in genuine communicative contexts. To achieve this, learners are provided numerous opportunities to hear and produce the target

utterances. In the past, these opportunities came in the form of drill exercises and pattern practice (Rivers & Temperley, 1978). Because such exercises focused mostly on utterances sharing similar patterns but not meanings, they were considered incompatible with genuine communication (Harmer, 1982).

More recent versions of CLT have recognized a role for form-focused instruction and are more receptive to automatization. However, in these versions, practice, if conducted at all, occurs entirely outside communication. Thus, in CLT approaches where classroom activities progress from form-focused to communicative activities (Paulston, 1971; Rivers & Temperley, 1978), drills are conducted *before* students engage in genuine communication. In task-based approaches where the activities progress from communication to form-focused activities (Willis, 1996), repetitive practice is conducted only *after* students have already completed communicative tasks. Day and Shapson (2001) promote a combined experiential and analytic curriculum that includes form-focusing games for promoting mastery of language forms both *before* and *after* the communication component, but not inside it as is the case in ACCESS; thus Day and Shapson maintain the tradition of keeping automatization and communication apart.

ACCESS differs from these CLT methodologies because the communication component itself both initiates and sustains automatization, thus overcoming the alleged incompatibility between communication and automatization. This is accomplished in ACCESS by situating automatization in context (genuine communication criterion), by eliciting and subjecting to automatization a critical mass of utterances (functional-formulaicity criterion), and by repeatedly eliciting and practising many tokens of each targeted utterance (inherent repetitiveness criterion). Automatization within the communicative component is complemented by the Language Consolidation Phase, which provides additional, intensive practice with problematic utterances identified during the earlier phase.

Three features of ACCESS promote automaticity. The first is the creation of *sustained interaction*, which provides students with many opportunities to speak and listen, thus exposing them to different ways of manipulating utterances and thereby familiarizing them with different nuances of meanings and uses of the essential speech segments. The second feature is providing opportunities for the *simultaneous exposure to both correct and incorrect versions* of the essential speech segments. The inaccurate versions come from the learners themselves and from their peers, as they attempt (initially, unsuccessfully) to express their communicative intentions. The accurate versions come

from the teacher who models the targeted utterances (e.g., when he or she prompts students, writes utterances on the board as they are elicited, recasts them, or focuses on their formal structure) and from peers who have already improved their control of these utterances. The ACCESS approach rejects the view that students should only be exposed to correct versions. Instead, it assumes that exposure to both correct and incorrect versions of utterances gives students the opportunity to notice discrepancies between the two, helping them internalize how utterances should or should not sound. Tomasello and Herron (1989) suggest that learners learn to make cognitive comparisons between their own deviant utterances and correct ones. We add here that they develop this ability as they continuously receive help in separating accurate from inaccurate utterances. In ACCESS, this help comes from teachers' opportune and timely corrective feedback.

The third feature is *inherent repetition*, which allows students numerous occasions to hear and use the same essential speech segments. Repetition promotes automatization by leading to cognitively more efficient ways of processing information (Schneider & Chein, 2003), which, in turn, leads to faster, more accurate, and more cognitively efficient production of utterances. Repetition also ensures that students who produce an utterance incorrectly the first time have other chances to attempt correct versions throughout the lesson. Skehan (1996) suggests that in truly communicative interactions, the intense focus on meaning may prevent students from noticing the form of the utterances they use (see also VanPatten, 1990). We suggest that this is true only when students have just one or two opportunities to hear and use a particular utterance. Where students have numerous opportunities to use the same utterance, early repetitions coupled with appropriate corrective feedback will firmly establish the link between utterances and function, and subsequent repetitions will firmly establish the link between the utterances and its function and with later repetitions, students will be free to focus on forms. Repetition can thus become both a source and a vehicle for learning (N. Ellis, 2002).

The role of the teacher

Teachers normally play three roles in the language classroom – facilitator, monitor, and knowledge provider. In ACCESS, teachers serve as facilitators and monitors, as in other CLT approaches. As facilitators, they ensure that planned activities proceed smoothly from one stage to the next. As monitors, they ensure that students keep on task and progress. The traditional role of direct knowledge provider, however, is

supplanted by that of resource providers supplying the targeted utterances at the moment of need, and by that of rehearsal monitor, ensuring intensive practice for these utterances.

Traditional teaching activities within ACCESS

The teacher's traditional primary role of presenting information *about* the language is not central in ACCESS. However, when needed, brief opportunities for this type of teaching do exist in ACCESS. One such opportunity occurs during the Creative Automatization Phase. During a communication activity, the teacher may notice some learners committing similar errors. Here the teacher can interrupt to focus on these errors. The intervention can range from simply pointing out the error to giving grammatical explanations. Although it may be objected that such interruptions break the communicative flow, this should be no more fatal than the school principal making announcements during class hours via the internal public address system. Normally, after such an interruption, the lesson proceeds as before. This teacher-fronted type of intervention should, of course, occur only when the need arises, as when the difficulty with utterances is general and pervasive. Another opportunity for form-oriented teaching occurs during the Language Consolidation Phase, when teachers focus on improving control of utterances that had earlier posed difficulties.

Promoting skills other than speaking and skill at all levels with ACCESS

The underlying principles of the ACCESS approach to CLT allow one to adapt the illustrative module for teaching reading, listening, and even writing, as long as multi-word utterance chunks, with great re-use potential, continue to be found in written or oral texts (Granger, 1998). In terms of levels, ACCESS is appropriate not only for beginning learners but also for intermediate and advanced ones. Interestingly, even so simple a task as FAMILY can be used successfully with advanced learners and even with ESL teachers (in CLT workshops). When used with advanced learners or teachers, FAMILY invariably elicits more sophisticated language than that expected from second language learners (e.g., *Okay, I seem to be the oldest here so I suppose I should take on the role of grandfather* instead of simply *I am the grandfather*). But even with these participants, the expected targeted utterances (e.g., *George is my father. Mary is his sister-in-law.*) still emerge. The ACCESS approach works well with beginners because it directly addresses their urgent

need for utterances that can be put to immediate use. It is appropriate for intermediate and advanced learners because its focus on contextual automatization deals well with fossilized errors characteristic of the speech of these groups. Of course, to be appropriate for advanced learners, the activities must elicit more sophisticated and complex language (e.g., arguing a case, gathering and synthesizing information from authentic reading and listening texts).

Related issues in applied linguistics

At this point, it is useful to look briefly at ACCESS in the light of three issues of current major concern in applied linguistics: formulaicity, automatization, and grammatical control. These issues reflect some of the central components of ACCESS that are included in this approach to CLT, not simply for pragmatic reasons (i.e., because there is consensus that they work), but also because they are theoretically motivated by current ideas in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics.

Formulaicity

Formulaicity refers to the prevalence in speech of multi-word constructions known as formulas or formulaic constructions (Wray, 2002). Research documenting the widespread use of these constructions in both mature language users (Altenberg, 1998; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Schmitt, 2004; Wray, 2002) and language acquirers' speech (e.g., Hakuta, 1974; Peters, 1983) has led to the suggestion that these constructions play a major role in language acquisition (Myles, Mitchell, & Hooper, 1999; Nattinger & de Carrico, 1992; Peters, 1983; Wray, 2002) and therefore should be systematically taught in the classroom. However, although many have written about the expected benefits of teaching formulaic utterances, few have actually proposed how to accomplish this. Among those who have done so are Nattinger and de Carrico (1992), Lewis (1997), and Willis (1990). Despite their differing perspectives, these writers share the common assumption that teaching formulas involves two steps: teaching formulas as chunks and helping learners break the chunks up into constituent parts to promote awareness of their internal construction.

Given its emphasis on functional utterances with high reuse potential, ACCESS provides an appropriate way to teach formulaic utterances. However, it differs from Nattinger and de Carrico's (and others') approach in giving primacy to the *automatic* mastery of utterances as

such, whereas Nattinger and de Carrico focus on the analysis of formulaic utterances into constituent parts. In ACCESS, the goal of teaching is to help students learn to use whole utterances flawlessly, effortlessly, and appropriately. Analysis of these constructions is intended only to facilitate automatizing the whole utterance.

The illustrative module utterances such as *This is _____, my nephew. He is my brother's eldest son. This is _____, my nephew. He is my brother's oldest son* are formulaic. One can, of course, question whether these are indeed formulaic in the sense discussed in the formulaicity literature. Indeed, a close look at recent taxonomies of formulaic utterances (e.g., Moon, 1998) shows that the formulaic utterances targeted in FAMILY rarely appear. This absence, however, merely reflects the fact that the taxonomies were derived from computerized language corpora collected without reference to pragmatic functions. When pragmatic functions are taken into account, the kinds of utterances identified here may meet the frequency criterion for formulaicity. Wolfson's (1983) and Manes's (1983) work on compliments supports this. Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2002) also reported a high percentage of frequently recurring multi-word chunks in the speech of native speakers describing weekend activities (*I stayed home. I went out*). Even a cursory investigation of commonly discussed topics in the media indicates that many are associated with formulaic utterances. For example, news reports on fires frequently contain recurrent utterances such as *Fire broke out. The cause of the fire is unknown. Arson is suspected*. In other words, the formulaic nature of an utterance cannot be fully divorced from the contexts in which it occurs. If this is the case, many potentially formulaic utterances – especially pedagogically relevant utterances – may be missed by looking for them in large, functionally undifferentiated 'representative' corpora, whereas many more may be found if searched for in specific pragmatic contexts (Coulmas, 1981) and communicative situations (Kecskes, 2002; Read & Nation, 2004).

Automatization

Interest in promoting automaticity has always been a major concern for those who view language acquisition in terms of skill acquisition (DeKeyser, 2001; Segalowitz, 2003). Gains in automaticity during language learning can be viewed as gains reflecting faster and more efficient processing that result from internal restructuring of the cognitive resources underlying language comprehension and production. Within this perspective, researchers will want to look for pedagogically

effective means to promote automaticity and also for ways to determine whether observed gains can really be attributed to restructuring of underlying cognitive processes (Segalowitz, 2003; Segalowitz & Segalowitz, 1993). ACCESS, viewed as a particular way of thinking about CLT, makes explicit the assumptions, goals, and teaching procedures that specifically target automaticity in fluency development and does so in a way that lends itself, in principle, to empirical verification.

Promoting grammatical competence

To become accomplished speakers, learners must master more than just formulaic sequences. Although mature language speakers do tend to use formulas frequently, they certainly have the competence to deal with creative and novel utterances. Can a methodology like ACCESS, by focusing as it does on formulaic utterances, help learners acquire the grammatical competence (the 'grammaring ability' in Larsen-Freeman's terms, 2001) needed for handling all kinds of utterances, especially novel ones? This question is central to current debate on rule- versus item-based learning (R. Ellis, 1999). This debate concerns whether learning consists of acquiring rules (rule-based learning) or simply mastering specific exemplars of language (e.g., Hopper, 1998; Kemmer & Barlow, 1999). Each view has its supporters. Some have suggested that language acquirers do not learn predetermined sets of rules (Hopper, 1998, p. 156) but learn particular instances of usage and construct commonalities from these instances as they go along (Goldberg, 1998, p. 209; Healy et al., 1998, p. 18; see also Kemmer & Barlow, 1999). Skehan (1996) suggests that both rules and specific utterances are learned either simultaneously or successively (exemplar-based learning occurring in the early stages followed by rule-based learning). N. Ellis (2002) identifies frequency-based exemplar learning as a major force in second language learning.

An utterance-based CLT approach to fluency can be useful for gathering information about many issues concerning exemplar-based learning. For example, since explicit grammatical analysis and explanation are kept to a minimum in ACCESS, the creative automatization component can be used for testing whether learners exposed only to exemplars will learn features of the underlying system governing those exemplars. Because the ACCESS approach to CLT promotes the learning of exemplars in natural contexts, it could also be useful for testing the generalizability of conclusions from artificial grammar learning studies (Reber, 1976; Schmidt, 1994) to real life and instructed language learning.

Summary and conclusions

This article outlined the ACCESS approach, which aims directly at promoting fluency by initiating and sustaining automatization in a manner compatible with a communicative approach to language teaching. It was argued that for the approach to succeed in its automatizing goal, the Main Task classroom activities need to meet three specific criteria – the activity must be genuinely communicative and inherently repetitive, and the utterances it elicits for learning must be functionally formulaic. These criteria ensure that useful, reusable utterances are generated and are subjected to contextual practice and automatization. To enhance the automatizing effects of these activities, specially designed form-focused activities are included, as needed.

In certain respects, many of the features contained in ACCESS are traditional, and teachers will easily recognize many of the illustrative activities as similar to ones they have developed or used. Even the overall organization of the phases shown in Figure 1 is not entirely new, insofar as moving from communication to form-focused teaching and back to communication is a typical progression in task-based activities (Willis, 1996). Two things about ACCESS, however, are new. One is its focus on automaticity and the goal of promoting it primarily through genuine communication. The other is the attempt to identify the place in the lesson structure where automatization can most effectively be achieved.

The methodological perspective presented here is not meant to supplant current CLT methodologies. Rather, it is presented as one alternative to these methodologies and one that specifically deals with automatization – a goal that has not yet received much attention. Making the automatization of utterances in genuine communicative context a central goal means it is possible for a CLT methodology (as exemplified by ACCESS) to be designed to allow students to go home at the day's end with concrete and tangible things to work on (e.g., practise, analyze, and use essential speech segments). Reinstating a place and rationale for form-focused teaching, albeit with constraints, also means that ACCESS may be attractive to teachers who feel that traditional teaching techniques and procedures have a valuable place in their classrooms.

ACCESS brings together insights and knowledge gathered from personal experience as well as from the collective insights of many teachers, as described in the literature. What makes this formulation different from its predecessors is the attempt to make the approach

testable by making the design criteria explicit and by founding it on basic principles concerning learning, memory, attention, and skill acquisition drawn from cognitive science.

Finally, CLT has been used for more than three decades; yet its theoretical foundations have not advanced significantly in many years (Nassaji, 1999). We have gathered much information about language learning from second language acquisition research, corpus linguistics, pedagogy, psychology, and other fields of enquiry. The time has come to put these insights together to see how they can help CLT evolve in ways that lead to improved practical solutions for promoting fluency.

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Acknowledgements

Preparation of this article was supported by a grant to the authors from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The authors gratefully acknowledge the comments of Patsy Lightbown and Pavel Trofimovich on earlier versions of this manuscript.

Notes

- 1 It is beyond the scope of this article to review in detail the many cognitive factors that are at play during instructed second language learning, especially during communicatively based instruction aimed at promoting fluency. Among the factors we have discussed elsewhere as especially important are encoding specificity and transfer appropriateness of learning, the development of automaticity, and the control of attention specific to second language materials (Segalowitz, 1997, 2000; 2003; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Segalowitz & Gatbonton, 1995; Segalowitz & Segalowitz, 1993). Investigation of how these psychological factors operate during

language learning faces a number of challenges, including finding ways to operationalize psychological variables so as to permit testing that is not inappropriately decontextualized and testing that sensitively reflects the special nature of communicative-based instruction. No single study by itself is going to validate or disconfirm the psychological premises of the CLT approach presented in this paper; it will take a series of studies converging on a particular conclusion to achieve that (as is true for all attempts to understand the psychological underpinnings of instructed language learning). Our goal is to present a very specific, concrete approach to CLT that makes explicit what psychological factors are assumed to be involved, and to do so in a way that invites research into the validity of this viewpoint. Naturally, we expect that once such research is undertaken, our understanding of the psychological processes involved in CLT and how to best recruit these processes to promote fluency will have to be revised and refined. The first step, however, is to have before us a version of CLT that is explicit about where it is appropriate to ask psychological questions.

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Appendix A

The job interview for intermediate- to advanced-level students

(a common communicative activity redesigned to fit the requirements of ACCESS)

Creative Automatization Phase

Pre-Task

- 1 Find out if students have had job interviews before. What kind of job were they looking for? What questions were asked? (alternatively, find out if students are looking for jobs. What kind of jobs are they looking for? What qualifications, experiences do they have, etc.?)

Main Task

Part 1: Prepare for interview

- 1 State: A managerial position has been advertised. Someone must be chosen to fill it.
- 2 Form groups: Ask five students to form a group to represent hiring panel of the company. Ask rest of the students to form a group representing applicants to this job.
- 3 Instruct panel: Ask the panel to (a) come to a consensus about what the job entails (status of job – part-time or full-time, salary, benefits); and (b) describe the ideal candidate for the job (e.g., required educational qualifications, work experience, etc.).
- 4 Instruct applicants: Ask applicants to (a) prepare a profile of the ideal candidate for the position, specifying educational qualifications, experience, salary desired, benefits expected; (b) record details on prepared form; (c) exchange profiles with another student; (d) study the other student's profile; and (e) apply for the position as the person described on the form (alternatively, have applicants work in pairs to prepare profiles of two ideal candidates, and later have each take ownership of profile the peer has prepared).

Part 2: The job interview

- 1 Instruct panel: Ask panel to (a) interview applicants. Probe whether each has the profile of the candidate for the position as earlier planned; and (b) record information about each applicant in a chart.

- 2 Instruct rest of students: Ask students to take turns playing the role of applicant. In responding to questions, they must use information from profile sheets they prepared or received. In other words, have the students assume different personas from their real selves.

Part 3: Post-interview deliberations

- 1 Form groups: Divide class into five or six groups, depending on panel size. Make sure each group has one panel member in it.
- 2 Instruct groups: Ask students to agree on which applicants should be given the job. Encourage them to base their decisions on which applicant had a profile closest to the one prepared by the panel. Once consensus is reached, ask the group to recommend its candidate to the whole class.

Part 4: Final selection

- 1 Ask class to select one candidate for the job.

Language Consolidation Phase

- 1 Fluency exercises: Have students work in groups. Ask them to describe the credentials of real people in the community (e.g., their teacher – she has several years experience). Alternatively, name a job (e.g., Attorney General) and ask students to name a community leader they know and to indicate whether this person has the credentials for the job.
- 2 Accuracy exercises: Focus on common errors in interview questions and utterances describing work, educational qualifications, experience.
- 3 Grammar: Focus on structure of ‘what’ questions commonly used in a job interview.

Free Communication Phase

- 1 Discuss whether the right candidate was chosen. Was the process fair? Why or why not? Alternatively, have students read an article about a person appointed to a government position and discuss whether this person has credentials for the job.