

Second Language Acquisition and the Communicative Approach.

by Ian Wozzley

Any English teaching should preferably cover language acquisition because it is the theory generated about this that informs every single other aspect of what teachers do in the classroom. And it is knowing about this that helps you to gauge whether you are doing things right or not, which in turn gives you greater confidence in your abilities. ALTs come to Japan with bags of enthusiasm to do a great job, but they need the tools to do that. So, here in Niigata, this website is a move towards that end, and so is the teaching section, and so is this article. This will by no means cover all the theory available on language acquisition, but it will give you the gist of the most basic stuff and form a base, from where you go is up to you. If you want to know more, please read some of the books listed at the end that have served as references. The article will at least try to keep things simple and to the point (and will hence forfeit some accuracy) and most importantly, it will try to relate everything to your job. Feel free to email your comments/criticisms/additions. All mistakes are down to me. This is probably going to be long, but here goes ...

We'll start with a survey of the main schools of thought that have tried to explain second language acquisition so far. They all have their merits, they all contribute, they all have their shortcomings and they are all situated in their own historical circumstances, i.e. the way of thinking at the time. Also, they all contribute to each other, as one approach follows on to the next or arises in opposition to previous ones. As teachers, we should take what we want from each of them and make our own eclectic approach, based on our own students' needs, so as to give them the best that we can. If you don't want all the history and theory, you can skip it and go on to 'The Communicative Classroom' on page 9. If you read all of it, you will probably have to read the theory a couple of times, or in chunks.

The Classic Approach (pre-20th Century)

Prior to the twentieth century, in the West, established 'foreign language learning', if you could call it that, basically meant learning Latin or Greek, "thought to promote intellectuality through 'mental gymnastics'" (Douglas Brown 1994:15). Languages were not learned for the purpose of oral and aural communication, but for the sake of being 'scholarly' or for gaining reading proficiency. There was very little theoretical research on the subject and so classical foreign languages were taught like any other subject and modern languages came to be taught in much the same way. The chief means was the Classic Method, which later came to be known as the Grammar Translation Method, still

used in many ways for language teaching today, worldwide. The following (Prator and Celce-Murcia cf. *ibid*) lists its major features:

1. Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language.
2. Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.
3. Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.
4. Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words.
5. Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early.
6. Little attention is paid to the context of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis.
7. Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue
8. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation

You have likely seen much of this in your students' grammar, reading and writing lessons, and their textbooks, at least in parts, despite the fact that it "does virtually nothing to enhance a student's communicative ability in the language" and its "theorylessness" (*ibid*:16). The Grammar Translation method is utilized because it "requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers" and "tests of grammar rules and of translations are easy to construct and can be objectively scored", thus "many standardized tests of foreign languages still do not attempt to tap into communicative abilities, so students have little motivation to go beyond grammar analogies, translations and rote exercises" (*ibid*). This, essentially, is what ALTs and modern, up to date teacher education for JTEs are here to change in Japan (hopefully), but you will probably have noticed that changes in language teaching policy (which are slowly happening) are needed to achieve this too.

The Structural/Behavioral Approach (Early 1900s, 1940s and 1950s)

Starting in the 1900s, but coming into full fruition in the 40s and 50s, this approach was born in the groundbreaking-but-misguided, positivist tradition of the social sciences (based on the model given by the natural sciences), the 'scientific method', when we all thought we could go out and observe everything 'as it is' objectively (picture the colonialist white man with his pen and paper 'objectively' documenting the native's point of view as if it didn't matter that the documenting was all being done by a colonialist white man). In linguistics, this meant "a rigorous application of the scientific principle of observation of human languages. Only the 'publicly observable responses' could be subject to investigation. The linguist's task, according to the structuralist, was to describe human languages and to identify the structural characteristics of those languages" (*ibid*:8),

which can all be infinitely different and which can all be dismantled, described, contrasted and put back together again. There can be no preconceived ideas to the study itself, only observable data recorded from the speaker who is “merely the locus of verbal behavior, not the cause” (*ibid*:9). Consciousness and intuition (of both the researcher and of the language user) were regarded as illegitimate, mentalistic, unempirical domains of inquiry and therefore irrelevant.

Learning a language was seen as a process of habit formation resulting from input and positive reinforcement of correct habits, negative reinforcement of mistakes. The learner was a blank canvas who learned a language as a set of habits through imitation. Mistakes were seen as unwanted interference from the habits acquired with the learner’s first language. There was also a massive shift towards learning languages in order to communicate orally and aurally (hooray!). Based on these premises, the Audiolingual Method became the primary teaching method, which can be characterized by the following (Prator and Celce-Murcia cf *ibid*):

1. New material is presented in dialog form.
2. Dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and overlearning.
3. Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis and taught at one time.
4. Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills.
5. There is little or no grammatical explanation: grammar is taught by inductive analogy rather than deductive explanation.
6. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context.
7. There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids.
8. Great importance is attached to pronunciation.
9. Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted.
10. Successful responses are immediately reinforced.
11. There is a great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances.
12. There is a tendency to manipulate language and disregard content.

You probably also see this occurring in many of your students’ classes and have used some of it yourself to reinforce the structures or dialogs. These are the drills that you and your high school students may hate, and they are effectively what you do when you use flash cards with elementary students who scream the target vocabulary or expression back at you. The method was particularly popular with the military in the latter half of the 20th century because soldiers needed to quickly learn how to communicate with both their allies and enemies alike, hence its other name, the “Army Method”. James Bond probably learnt Russian with this method, but it has since been discarded in research because of “its ultimate failure to teach long-term communicative proficiency” and the realization

that “language was not really acquired through a process of habit formation and over-learning, that errors were not necessarily to be avoided at all costs, and that structural linguists did not tell us everything about language that we need to know” (*ibid*:75). Linguists have moved on, which is why the tape recorders and huge headphones in the language labs at high schools are gathering cobwebs, in favor of you. But like Grammar Translation, drills and other such methods still have their uses as you and your JTEs are probably well aware.

The Rational/Cognitive Approach (1960s and 1970s)

Enter left (definitely not right) Noam Chomsky (1959) who tried to show that “human language cannot be scrutinized simply in terms of observable stimuli and responses” (Lightbown and Spada 1999:9). Rather, he sees language acquisition as the gradual, creative build up of knowledge systems, resulting in improved general *competence*; not just *performance* of habits in isolated instances (*ibid*:25). Chomsky used rational logic, reason, extrapolation and inference to explain language acquisition, rather than empirical observation to describe it. For example, he pointed out that although two children in different families would receive different input, they will both develop a sound grasp of the English grammar by the age of 5 or 6. Moreover, they do this despite ‘degenerate input’, that is, the messy nature of spoken language – hesitations, unfinished sentences, ungrammatical phrases, false starts, fillers etc. Children develop knowledge of underlying rules through internal processes – rule-governed, innate creativity, not merely through habit formation. He pointed toward the existence of a *Language Acquisition Device* in the brain that takes care of this, and a *Universal Grammar* underlying all languages, both of which are controversial. Chomsky concentrated on first language acquisition, but his theory is relevant to second language acquisition too. The most important thing to remember here is the idea of innate creativity in language learners, based on internal cognitive processes. This can be illustrated by a comparison of the two theories below.

Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

As mentioned above, the structural/behavioral approach to second language acquisition and learning views mistakes as interference from the habits developed in using the first language effectively. These habits prevent the learner from using the target language correctly and are therefore best eradicated. Contrastive Analysis was developed as a means of contrasting native and target languages to predict what errors might occur in language learning (for a useful analysis of Japanese learners of English, see Thompson in Swan and Smith 1987). Such analysis has proved useful in some ways, particularly with

regard to pronunciation. However, it is not by itself a sufficient way of looking at mistakes, particularly because it takes very little account of the learner.

The cognitive approach to language learning led to Error Analysis (see Littlewood 1984), a new and completely different way of viewing 'mistakes', according to the premise that language learners actively construct their own rule system, based on their present knowledge of the target language, backed up by their knowledge of how languages work in general, which includes their native language and any other languages they may already know. These rule systems - mental maps of the target language - gradually improve over time as learners experiment and learn by trial and error. Errors are a result of the evolving rule system. The learner actively forms hypotheses about the target language, which he or she then employs. However, the rule system is oversimplified, resulting in errors, which the learner can then use to modify and improve their knowledge of the target language, gradually becoming more and more sophisticated, and errors occur less. Common types of errors include the following, all of which are part of the same underlying learning strategy:

1. Overgeneralization – this occurs when we make predictions about the target language, which turn out to be wrong. For example, a particular item belongs to a different category, which is covered by another rule, or is simply an exception to the rule that the learner is employing.
2. Transfer – the learner uses knowledge of their native language to make predictions about the target language. This type of error has been found to be more common among beginners.
3. Omission/Redundancy Reduction – the learner omits certain parts of speech, which are not necessary to the overall goal of communication

Other errors, which are not part of a specific learning strategy, include the following:

1. Learners are forced to communicate in any ad hoc manner when there are no appropriate rules or items available to them. This could mean using just one-word phrases or even resorting to reading out expressions for the first time from a phrasebook. This is different to omission.
2. Performance errors – some errors are simply lapses made at the time, caused for example, by nervousness.
3. Bad teaching – learners become confused by faulty teaching, or suffer from overteaching of certain rules.
4. Fossilization – some errors never disappear due to many possible reasons.

Error Analysis sees 'mistakes' as an inevitable and useful part of 'learner language' or 'interlanguage' (terms used to describe the features of language produced by learners of that language, as opposed to proficient speakers), which occurs as learners creatively attempt to build up their knowledge of the target language (so mistakes really are "OK!"). Some have even suggested that an 'internal syllabus' exists within the learner dictating an order to learning. This syllabus may be common to many learners of the same target language, but is also heavily influenced by the first language. The external syllabus that students follow at school can be complimentary or contradictory to the internal syllabus, but not enough is known about it. Error Analysis though, consolidated the idea of creative construction in learners, which you have most likely experienced yourself when consciously or sub-consciously figuring out how the rules of Japanese work (which are fortunately extremely regular); Constructivism (below) seems in many ways to be an extension of the Cognitive Approach and Error Analysis.

The Constructivist Approach (1980s onwards)

Chomsky did not deal with second language learning. The most widely known constructivist to do this is Krashen (1982) whose Monitor Theory is very influential among language teachers, largely due to its intuitive nature and its immediate practical implications for the classroom. It is made up of 5 main hypotheses (taken from Lightbown and Spada 1999):

1. The *Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis*, which states that 'acquisition' and 'learning' are two distinctly different processes. Language is 'acquired' through meaningful interaction in the target language with no attention to form, whereas it is 'learned' through a conscious study process with great attention to form. Krashen sees acquisition as by far the more important of the two and also asserts that learning cannot turn into acquisition. They are completely separate.
2. The *Monitor Hypothesis* asserts that while the acquired system controls the learner's fluency in the target language, the learned system acts as an editor or monitor to change and polish the learner's accuracy. This requires time, focus and rule-learning, is more conducive to written than spoken English and can only be used to polish what has been acquired through communication, which should always remain the main priority.
3. The *Natural Order Hypothesis* states that we acquire the rules of a language in a predictable order and that the *natural order* is independent of the order in which rules are taught at school. Research on the acquisition of grammatical morphemes as a researchable example of this (e.g. the plural -s; or past tense -ed) has shown that learners pass through similar learning stages.

4. The *Input* Hypothesis asserts that language is acquired only through comprehensible input – understanding others. If the input is just beyond the level of the learner, both comprehension and acquisition will occur. This is referred to as $i+1$.
5. The *Affective Filter* Hypothesis points to an imaginary barrier in the learner that prevents acquisition from taking place due to affective factors such as motives, needs, attitudes and emotional states. Angry, tense, anxious or bored learners will screen out input making acquisition impossible. Happy, smiling, motivated learners are far more likely to use input for acquisition, as their *affective filter* is lowered.

You may find that Krashen's theories appeal to your intuition and common sense, especially if you apply them to both your students' learning of English and your own learning of Japanese. You will probably have witnessed or experienced a difference between acquisition (the natural way, in context) and learning (of rules and vocab); the monitor taking over as you correct yourself with hindsight, or abandoning it when you just want to get something across; the feeling that you really got somewhere when people interact with you at just above your ability ($i+1$); or the huge difference your mood can make to speaking Japanese, or an interesting class can make to your students' English abilities. Krashen appeals to a great number of linguists, language learners and teachers, but is also very controversial, not least because of his lack of empirical evidence (largely due to the difficulty involved in researching his theories) and his unwillingness to compromise on certain things such as the complete separation of acquisition and learning. Fortunately, we can take what we feel is right (which will differ from person to person) as we try to find a way to help our students use English. Some of what Krashen says has been found very useful as a model by many teachers, as they strive to achieve language acquisition with their students, not just rote learning of grammar rules.

The Social Interactionist Approach

This approach may seem like a logical next step, or perhaps even obvious to you. It asserts that the social and interactive nature of language means that acquisition cannot be just a one-way process achieved through comprehensible input alone, but is also achieved through the negotiation of meaning in a social context. Language operates interactively through two-way communication (or three or four ...) and therefore it is not just input that is important, but interaction, which ideally involves the learner actively contributing, practicing and producing language, for both a learning and a real social/communicative purpose. Linguistic competence requires competence in both the receptive skills (listening and reading) and the production skills (speaking and writing), which arise from successful interaction in effective social discourse.

Believe it or not, the Interactionist approach is very new in Linguistics. Whereas Structural/Behavioral, Cognitive/Rational and Constructivist approaches fall under the umbrella of Psycho-linguistics, which looks at what goes on in your head, Interactionist perspectives come under Socio-linguistics, which has looked at both the social context in which language is used, between people, as well as the specific social space of the classroom in which it is primarily learned in EFL contexts (as opposed to ESL, which is learned primarily in natural settings). It has even developed an entirely new grammar of English, based on social function (which is actually really interesting). In fact the possibilities in both fields are literally endless. Both have had a creative influence over the way we teach language today, particularly in communicative classes.

Formal and Natural Settings

Socio-linguists have looked at the actual settings in which language is learned, comparing formal, instructional settings (EFL) with natural acquisition settings (ESL). Such work has highlighted the many differences that exist between learning a language in a traditional classroom setting and acquiring a language naturally in an immersion environment. Characteristics of natural environments include the following (Lightbown and Spada 1993):

1. Learners are rarely corrected if they are sufficiently understood. It would probably be rude to do so. The emphasis is often on getting meaning across clearly, of which proficient speakers tend to be quite tolerant.
2. Language is not structured step by step, rather learners are exposed to a wide variety of structures and vocab.
3. The learner is surrounded by the language for many hours each day. This may be addressed to the learner, or simply overheard.
4. The learner encounters a number of different people who are proficient in the language.
5. The learner observes or participates in many kinds of language events and situations.
6. Modified input is readily available in one on one situations, but access to comprehensible input is difficult in the presence of many native speakers at one time.

Characteristics of the traditional language classroom include the following (*ibid*):

1. Errors are frequently corrected. Accuracy is given priority over meaningful interaction
2. Input is structurally simplified and sequenced, presented and practiced in isolation.

3. There is limited time for learning.
4. The teacher is often the only native or proficient speaker who students come into contact with.
5. Students experience a limited range of discourse types (quite often 'teacher asks a question/student responds/teacher evaluates response').
6. Students feel pressurized to produce the target language and to do so correctly from the beginning.
7. When/if teachers give instructions in the target language (egg classroom English), this is often modified.

The research highlights the stark differences between learning naturally and in traditional classrooms, and also the important role that interaction plays in learning. This is not to say that students should learn languages the all natural way because that is unrealistic, but the two lists above illustrate well the shortcomings of the environments in which students have traditionally been 'learning' languages. Theorists and practitioners alike emphasize the importance of striking a balance between the two so that naturalistic, communicative language learning can be brought into the classroom environment, that is, a communicative classroom.

The Communicative Classroom

The communicative style of language teaching began in the 1970s and developed in response to a growing dissatisfaction with prevailing methodologies, and in recognition of theoretical advances. It is not the direct result of any one way of looking at language and language learning, but is effectively the outcome of contributions given by the various different approaches. It started with Chomsky's Cognitive Approach, paying particular attention to his distinction between performance and linguistic competence, and was developed by the socio-linguist, Hymes, and then subsequently by countless others.

A dichotomy was drawn between the structural/behavioral emphasis on manipulating grammatical forms and achieving accuracy, and the new emphasis on communicative competence and the use of language to fulfill its communicative function, concentrating on fluency. Both accuracy and fluency are necessary parts of linguistic competence. Language was not just thought of in terms of *usage*, i.e. the manipulation of grammar, but also in terms of *use*, i.e. the appropriate use of language in a variety of situations and circumstances. In the 70s, grammar was even completely abandoned by some who assumed students would naturally pick it up via communicative learning, but due to a sharp decline in learner accuracy and the realization that grammatical accuracy is a necessary part of linguistic competence and communication, the communicative teaching

of grammar was integrated into the overall approach. Grammar was “necessary, but not sufficient” (McDonough and Shaw 1993:25) and the language learner has a whole bunch of other things to keep in mind too, such as:

1. The social and cultural rules which apply to the context or situation.
2. The relationship between the interactants.
3. The purpose of the communication.
4. The topic.
5. How to use the channel of communication (spoken or written) for a specific purpose.

Given the decades of research and experience that has gone into developing it then, the Communicative Approach has a lot to take into account and therefore has a very broad and rich scope of characteristics, the basics of which I have tried my best to lay out here:

1. Both spoken and written language are important. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are all necessary parts of communicative competence, whether it's reading a menu, ordering the food, or filling in an application form to work at the restaurant.
2. Language is viewed and learned within its social and cultural context, which learners need to develop knowledge of in order to develop appropriate language use, e.g. talking to friends, facilitating a meeting, or writing a letter. There is an emphasis on the authentic use of language, as it would be used in its real context.
3. Focus is on meaning, rather than language structure, which is seen as a means of aiding the understanding and production of meaning.
4. Both fluency and accuracy are important. Grammar is necessary for communication to occur, but not sufficient by itself. (Socio-linguists have developed a new way of looking at grammar that shows how we change and adapt it according to social function and circumstances, thus improving our knowledge of how language is used *appropriately*). Students need grammatical explanations, drills and exercises, when and only when they are appropriate.
5. Course content is based on student needs. What do they need to learn/use English for? Interacting with friends? Functioning day to day abroad? Work? Passing their exams?
6. Teaching is more learner-centered. Students are far more involved, rather than listening to the teacher for 50 minutes. Students should be encouraged to contribute as much as possible.
7. The teacher becomes more a planner and facilitator of language learning activities, helping the students throughout, rather than a didactic teacher.
8. Mistakes are only corrected when appropriate, for example, after an activity has occurred, not during. To correct a student while they are communicating would

hinder the main goal of successful and effective communication. Students will find it useful though to hear what they were doing wrong, once they are done, especially if it is an error common to the whole class.

9. Activities are based on real-life communication because that is what we learn languages for, e.g. “This is my friend, Keiko. She’s from Japan”, rather than “This is a pen. That is a pencil”.
10. Activities are task-based in which language is used for a purpose, often based on an information-gap and/or the sharing of information to achieve such a communicative purpose, e.g. selling fruit, making an appointment, a class survey or debating the pros and cons of school uniform.
11. Course content is more relevant to students’ lives so they can actually use it and are more likely to want to.
12. Use of pair-work and group-work activities is common as well as individual and also teacher-led activities. Varied types of interaction are encouraged and nurtured. Learners hear more types of language from different sources, interact with more people, use language in context, hear it repeated, rephrased and clarified, ask and answer questions, build confidence and don’t have to speak in front of the entire class.

Communicative Activities

The above characteristics make up a communicative methodology, which determines the specific, individual methods and activities we refer to as communicative. You can see then, from this and from earlier sections on other approaches, that the larger ideas about languages and how they are learned have a top-down effect on the general methodology we follow and ultimately the individual activities that we pencil into our lesson plans. So, what follows is a brief look at four activities that, after introducing and practicing useful expressions and vocabulary, might be employed in a communicative classroom. Each activity has its strengths and weaknesses.

1. Class Survey (JHS and SHS; Simplified versions also possible at Elementary): The entire class carries out a survey of things that the students are interested in, e.g. favorite actors, hours spent watching TV, anything. Students can be divided into groups and each group decides what they will survey, so that each group does something different. Students design their survey/questionnaire and then are given time to approach other students and interview them, collecting data. Students return to their groups and collate their data to prepare for presenting their results to the class. This activity is task-based in that students use English to get something done. They interact and communicate for a real purpose, whilst probably also practicing

wh- questions and some set expressions during the survey, and perhaps simple present tense and comparatives and superlatives during the presentation. Thus, they practice and learn grammar and vocabulary as a by-product of the main communicative purpose. Activities working on similar principles include “Find Someone Who ...” and “Shopping” in which students go round different ‘shops’ in the classroom trying to buy many items using a dialog (with the extra bonus of mimicking a real-life situation).

2. Finding a Good Time... (JHS and SHS): Students work in pairs. They receive a handout of a blank, weekly schedule and are asked to fill it out randomly (or based on their real schedule), making sure to leave about half of it empty. They then work with a partner or several partners to find a time that they are both free to do something together. Once they have found a good time, they decide what it is they want to do, where and when, and then fill in the information in their schedule. This activity is also task-based involving a real communicative purpose. It is slightly advanced in that involves a lot of discourse, i.e. students must rally info back and forth, asking and replying until they reach an agreement. Students definitely need to practice the expressions and strategies for doing this beforehand and feel reasonably confident with it. It’s a very good activity, though. “Find the difference” activities, in which students try to find the differences between two pictures using English only, are based on similar principles.
3. Role-plays (JHS and SHS; Simplified versions possible at Elementary, e.g. greetings): Students work in pairs or small groups to write a short role-play using the target expressions in an appropriate situation and perform it, either in front of the whole class, or just to another pair/group/JTE/ALT, if it’s a shy class. This activity is not really task-based, but students do have to think about communicating in a real situation and what kind of language is needed to achieve that. They really have to think about using language in a real context and also benefit from seeing how other students have done that in their role-plays. It is however, a time-consuming activity, as each part of it takes some time, though if students are asked to do it regularly, the speed and ability with which they can do it will get better over time and they will benefit in the long term from using English in a very naturalistic way.
4. Pin the Tail on the Donkey (Elementary School): This is exactly the same as the popular party game you used to play as a kid. Students make groups. One student is blindfolded and must listen to the other kids’ instructions to pin the tail on the donkey in the right place. This is a Total Physical Response (TPR) activity in which students respond physically to the language they hear (like Simon Says). If the response is adequate, then effective communication has taken place. This kind of activity is very useful in Elementary school. Kids like it.

Individual Learning Styles

The communicative classroom offers a far more rounded and practical means of language learning aimed at producing competence in using the target language in the real world, a far from easy task. Central to whether it is effective or not though, is the extent to which teachers broaden their approach to how they employ it in the classroom. In a class of 30 to 40 students, it must not be assumed that 'one way fits all' because that class is made up of 30 to 40 individuals. The work done on individual learner differences is so abundant that it will not be included here, but suffice it to say that learners all differ according to a range of factors such as age, gender, motivation, personality, learning style, affective state, 'intelligence' and language aptitude among many others. That means they all learn best in different ways, which has very immediate implications for your lesson planning. One factor that needs to be included here (because it directly affects your lesson planning) is learning style.

While you may already be aware that learners have been known to differ according to perceptual style (learners may prefer visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, or tactile learning activities), Willing (1987 cf. Ellis 1997) has identified four different types of language learners, which whether he is right or not (its just one study), are very useful for us to think about. The four styles are listed below:

1. Concrete Learners – “Direct means of processing information; people-orientated; spontaneous; imaginative; emotional; dislikes routinized learning; prefers kinaesthetic modality” (*ibid*: 507). These learners tend to like games, pictures, films, video, using cassettes, talking in pairs and practicing English outside class.
2. Analytical Learners – “Focuses on specific problems and proceeds by means of hypothetical-deductive reasoning; object-orientated; independent; dislikes failure; prefers logical didactic presentation” (*ibid*). These learners like studying grammar, studying English books and reading newspapers, studying alone, finding their own mistakes and working on problems set by the teacher.
3. Communicative Learners – “Fairly independent; highly adaptable and flexible; responsive to facts that do not fit; prefers social learning and a communicative approach; enjoys taking decisions” (*ibid*). These students like to learn by watching, listening to native speakers, talking to friends in English and watching TV in English, using English out of class in shops, trains etc, learning new words by hearing them, and learning through conversations.
4. Authority-Orientated Learners – “Reliant on other people; needs teacher’s directions and explanations; likes a structured learning environment; intolerant of facts that do not fit; prefers a sequential progression; dislikes discovery learning” (*ibid*). These

learners prefer the teacher to explain everything, like to have their own textbook, to write everything in a notebook, to study grammar, learn by reading, and learn new words by seeing them.

As you can see, the four types of learners set out above are all quite different, and probably respond best to differing teaching approaches. You have probably identified the kinds of learners that would respond better to each of the theoretical language learning approaches set out earlier in this article. You have probably also noticed that there are learners who may not particularly benefit from doing lots of communicative activities, and yes, some students benefit from and actually prefer grammar translation and drills, and most kinds of learners need them for support and accuracy before trying the communicative stuff anyway. Everyone is different, everyone has a preferred way of learning and they all sit in the same classroom, which makes things a little difficult for us. Fortunately, there is one way to get around this though and that is eclecticism. Just because a learner (and a teacher) likes doing things one way, this does not mean that they cannot learn to do it in two, three or four ways, alongside their classmates who happen to prefer something different. In fact learning to learn is something that all students can benefit from. If you can broaden their scope and their learning skills in this way, you are helping them way beyond their team teaching classes. If there is one goal of this article, it is to supplement your experience with theory to help you become the 'informed eclectic' whereby you know what it is that you want to achieve, you know what your students want to achieve and you know some of the theoretical problems that stand in your way, but by broadening your approach and giving all kinds of activities a place where you can, you are able to appeal to all your students and make your lessons useful to everyone in some way. This basically means selecting from a range of different activities to fit in to a broad lesson plan, and you will probably see a logical order in which activities can be arranged (see also the article on Lesson Planning), moving from more controlled, grammar-based or teacher centered activities towards freer, more communicative and student-centered ones in context, so that students become more independent with the new target language and try to use it for a communicative purpose, which should always remain the ultimate goal of any lesson, and language learning in general.

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- Materials produced and supplied by the University of Technology, Sydney for my MA Applied Linguistics (2004 graduation) from which I have borrowed very heavily.

* Particularly recommended for ALTs.