Paradigm Lost? A Belated Reply to Jarvis and Atsilarat from Japan

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Abstract

This submission examines and challenges the preconceived and often ill-informed notions held by instructors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many Asian settings. It was Jarvis and Atsilarat's earlier publication in *Asian EFL Journal*, which took issue with the suitability of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology for the Asian context, that prompted this undertaking of a reflective review of the literature coupled with our own research. While it is one matter to disavow any paradigm, theory or set of theories, and corresponding methodology, it is indeed quite another to dismiss such a paradigm outright on the basis of some vague findings with an ill-equipped instrument. This initial paper provides a detailed review of the literature which takes stock of a range of theory and related topic discussion, situated in the broader heuristic paradigm that lends credence to the position that, CLT - if correctly interpreted and adequately integrated - is no less appropriate for modern Asian cultural settings, than it is in so many others.

Key Words: paradigm, methodology, context-based, communicative, learner centeredness

Introduction

> 'There is something about us as humans and our relationship to
> language that I think is going to transcend individual situations and
> context, but you should know that's a volatile issue right now.'
> (Larsen-Freeman *in Ancker,* 2001, p. 2)

We commence with an expression of gratitude to Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) for their contribution to the on-going debate on the appropriateness of communicative methodological practice in English language teaching (TESOL) environment. A persistent questioning of theory and methods leading to the conclusion that there is "no one best methodology" for every type of learner, or group of learners, is a view that is widely shared.

Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) in their research paper-*'Shifting paradigms: From a communicative to a context-based approach'* - hold to the opinion that the communicative based method has been widely adopted in 'everyday practice, and in parts of the world where this does not yet occur there is pressure to move in this direction' (2004, p. 2). They subscribe to some detached linear perspective that communicative methodology is the entrenched 'replacement of its audio-lingual or grammar translation predecessor' (2004, p. 2). They further question 'after a quarter of a century' of 'western context'- based 'dominance', whether the broader enveloping paradigm is in any way relevant or 'culturally appropriate' for Asian learners, owing to 'problems of implementing the approach within specific contexts'. Moreover, they argue that it is time to press ahead in search of a new paradigm (2004, pp. 3-4). In view of this, they undertook a study of forty English language teachers and eight hundred students at The Language Institute, Dhurakypundit University in Bangkok, Thailand.

They concluded that 'the combined responses from teachers and learners raise issues which question the validity and the viability of a number of the central tenants of CLT' in their cultural context (2004, p. 13).

After a careful reading of Jarvis and Atsilarant's (2004) paper, coupled with a critical look at their instrument items, overall design, and measures, we find the basis of their conclusions to be, at the least, fragile. While it is one matter to disavow a paradigm, theory or set of theories and corresponding methodology, it is indeed quite another to dismiss it outright on the basis of some vague findings with an ill-equipped instrument.

In this initial paper, we will provide a detailed review of the literature, which takes stock of a range of theory and related topic discussion, situated in the broader heuristic paradigm. Communicative language teaching principles are connected not just to theories of language learning, but are substantially intertwined with a curriculum-wide constructivist educational theory, as well as that of other disciplines, all of which are situated within the grand heuristic paradigm.

A follow-on article will offer a comparative analysis of the research from Jarvis and Atsilarat's (2004) study on the Thailand context; Savignon and Wang's (2003) examination of that in Taiwan; and, our own detailed survey research of the Japanese setting. This should provide some added insight into how, with some educational contextual adjustments, adoption of CLT methodology could prove less problematic, if not more endearing to its stakeholders in the Asian EFL context.

Paradigm Change—*what paradigm?*

> 'Paradigm "is a word too often used by those who would like to have a new idea but cannot think of one." - *Mervyn King, Deputy Governor, Bank of England*

In etymological terms, the word paradigm originates from the Greek word *paradeigm*, which means "pattern" or "example" from the word *paradeiknunai* meaning "demonstrate". However, it was Thomas Kuhn, indisputably one of the greatest historians and philosophers of science in the twentieth century, who coined the concept *paradigm.* In his view, a *paradigm* should not result in definite solutions agreed by all participants of a discipline, but rather it is intended to be 'sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to solve' (1996, p. 10).

Post-positivism took hold in the early 1980s replacing logical positivism and is now commonly referred to as the *heuristic paradigm* (which is based on human values) in a variety of fields including the philosophy of science, psychology, sociology, education, and linguistics. The heuristic paradigm draws from a significant body of research in cognitive, psycho-social, and linguistic science, all of which demonstrates that knowledge is based on the use of heuristics - rudimentary understandings linked to conceptual frameworks that enable us as researchers to organize knowledge and construct problems. Social scientists as a whole have 'adopted the Kuhnian phrase *paradigm shift* to denote a particular social phenomenon…' (Dictionary.LaborLawTalk.com).

Theory is the basis upon which the features of matter - in this case, education praxis are constructed. Theorists like Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Kohlbert, Sternberg, Gardner, Bloom, and Bruner have all contributed in a significant way to the present and increasingly accepted constructivist educational theory. *Constructivism* is concerned with the ways in which learners, both individually and collectively, interpret or construct the social and psychological world in specific linguistic, social, and historical contexts. Constructivism contradicts the tradition bound teacher-centered notion that learning is the transmission of content to a passive receiver. Rather, learning is an active process that is based on learner's current understanding. The theory holds that learning is best facilitated when it is contextual - accounting for the students' comprehension; active - engaging with learning activities that use analysis, debate, and critical (as opposed to simple memorization) to validate the relevance and authenticity of information; social - using discussions, direct interaction with experts and peers, and team-based projects (Fenton, 2005).

Constructivist Theory (Burner, 1966) from the outset, promoted the theme that learning is an active process, whereby information is acted on in conjunction with prior, acquired knowledge. The learner chooses and alters information, constructs hypotheses, and engages in decision making with the aid of a cognitive structure (i.e., schema, mental models) that affords meaning and organization to experiences, thereby enabling a person to move beyond the information provided.

The field of education as a whole has as of late largely embraced the core tenets of constructivist theory, spurred on by changed conditions enabled by relatively new information technologies and global information infrastructure developments (McCall, 1994; Demchenko, 1997). Sterling (2001, pp. 58-59) provides as broad an interdisciplinary overview as any on the contrastive features between what we will refer to as a "paradigm-past" and a "paradigm-to-last" - a 'mechanistic' versus as 'ecological' view. In brief, Sterling's framework is predicated on the belief that this broader paradigm transfer is operative on three levels: level one being the educational sphere; level two (curriculum, evaluation and assessment, management, community) accounting for organizational and management of the learning environment. Level three pertaining to learning and pedagogy, accounts for a view of teaching and learning, a view of the learner, teaching and learning styles, and a view of learning.

The "critical elements" which underpin the latest developments in the grand *Heuristic paradigm-to-last* are: **social presence**, **interaction**, **cognitive strategies**, **collaborative learning**, and **learner centeredness**. To follow is a succinct review of the literature. It will account for a *definition*, *principles* underlying its importance, and *operational activities*, both in the traditional face-to-face (F2F) learning environment, as well as the ever-expanding global learning environment afforded by technology; the essence of these of these being that of "communication" and increasingly "intercultural global communication".

Social presence entails the creation of an intellectual and emotional presence toward the aim of building a virtual community of learners in both F2F and virtual settings

(Gunawardena & Zittle, 1996). Such a presence needs to constitute an atmosphere that is friendly, functional and social; all the while, fostering member participants with an attitudinal desire to interact and communicate with significant others in both asynchronous and synchronous communication (Collins & Berge, 1996). F2F and the more recent on-line communication is more than words; it can be the degree to which members of a learning community are perceived as real people expressing both verbal and non-verbal cues in communicative form, whether written or spoken.

The *principles* underlying the importance of learning have been well documented. Learners with a sense of being a part of a community or group are more likely to assume ownership for their learning with greater success. In the context of on-line learning, the use of electronic tools can aid in developing a learning community, thereby enabling the inception of meaningful participant discourse (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1996). Irrespective of the medium of learning, providing a warm, respectful, and collegial environment will greatly enhance a sense of affiliation and solidarity among groups of learners. Community members need to regard their interactions as intrinsically valuable and educationally profitable (Rourke, *et al,* 2001). Further, an expert's social presence fosters affective knowledge acquisition, through modeling of behavior and attitudes. Learners can gain vicarious insight through observing peers, mentors and experts performing tasks, potentially internalizing knowledge and related skills (McKenderee, *et al,* 1998). Understanding requires articulation and reflection on what we know. These processes involve both internal and social negotiation, in which multiple perspectives are brought to bear in the refinement of ideas. Therefore, all

learning environments need to be established and maintained in which social negotiation of meanings can flourish (Jonassen, *et al*, 1995).

Operational activities for social presence, in a cursory sense, F2F or virtual, should include a warm opening and welcome on behalf of the facilitator; a brief overview of communication and discussion procedures; a welcome space where learner participants introduce themselves and provide an overview of their living or working situation; an active presence in the various discussion forums; facilitator reflection; question prompts organized by forum; topic specific activities for participant groups; timely monitoring and moderating of various interactions between participants; encouragement coupled with critical assessment of participation activities and assignment submissions; motivation of participant learners to actively participate through submissions and thoughtful responses to the contributions of others. These can entail synchronous as well as asynchronous interaction.

Interaction involves regular discourse among participant learners, and between learner and facilitator or topic experts, on-going interaction with content tools and the learning interface, all with the aim of making meaning and constructing knowledge (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1996; Jonassen, 1998). Reushle (1995, p. 149) notes that the 'notion of interaction necessitates an integrated combination of learner control and active participation.'

Principles underlying its importance are tied to active engagement with the course participants which enhances skill and competency development, coupled with the

facilitation and construction of knowledge. It has been demonstrated that meaningful learner interaction of both a personal and professional nature, positively affects intrinsic motivation, thereby enhancing one's problem-solving ability (Ragan, 1998, p. 3). Perhaps most importantly, regular communication between participants lends itself to mutually agreed knowledge constructs.

Operational activities that incorporate methods of engagement should be relevant to the specific needs of those participating in the course, and the corresponding learning activities (Laurillard, 1993). The operational activities require utilization of familiar content materials, software programs, and technical support, which lend ease to participant interaction; utilization of interactive cognitive tools (e-mail, simulation, etc.) F2F techniques to enable learning communication, collaboration and subsequent feedback; organization of learning opportunities through activities which engage participants in task specific thinking about course content; management of discussion forums which are authentic in challenging content, yet non-intimidating and "potentially" non-assessed.

Cognitive Strategies: Gagne, Briggs & Wager (1992) specify that a cognitive strategy is a 'control process' wherein learners identify and adapt their modes of participating, learning, retaining, and thinking. Its adoption should empower internal control processes in ordering and sequencing information with the aim of establishing their own mental prototypic notion.

Principles underlying its importance: Gunawardina & Zittle, *et al*. (1996) cite a host of techniques that can be invoked in the process of learning; namely, identified selection, organization, rehearsal and elaboration. They offer up discernable categories of cognitive strategies: grouping or 'chunking' strategies, special learning strategies, and linking strategies. In short, learner participants' cognitive strategies (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.) need to be matched with the relevant instructional strategies in order to realize predetermined learner outcomes.

Operational activities need to account for how target learners best acquire knowledge. Jonassen (1998) for example, asserts that a combined methodology of 'objectivism' and 'constructivism' offers varying perspectives; sequence learning activities via hierarchical structure of the target knowledge, thus ensuring that the basics have been acquired from the outset.

Collaborative learning is when individuals, or groups, work jointly in a co-operative manner to reflect on notions, issues and ideas from which they negotiate meaning, thus enhancing both the knowledge of the individual and the group as a whole.

Principles underlying its importance: Jonassen (1998) takes the view that collaborative learning environments can 'support constructivist learner-centered' activities. These activities enable self-directed, active problem-based meaningful learning. Recent advances in computers and communication technology are enabling greater numbers of learners to engage and collaborate across both time and space. In addition, collaborative based activities can stimulate idea linking, idea construction and

reflection; provide chances for the development of social presence; lend to the acquisition of varying perspectives through purposeful interaction; and the opportunity to discern one's own meaning betters a learner's own construction of knowledge concepts, thus building on multiple viewpoints. Gunawardina & Zittle (1996) cite research that demonstrates such attributes as increased motivation, completion rates, and learner satisfaction, even improved performance in smaller groups, as a result of collaborative group work.

Operational activities: Teles (1993) identifies two operational activities with special relevance to learning: structured group collaboration and unstructured peer collaboration. In order to facilitate collaborative learning, activities need to revolve around meaningful discourse. Learners must discuss, negotiate, and reflect with other students via computer-mediated communication. Jonassen (1995) writes: 'Conversation is an essential part of the meaning-making process'. Finally, it is important to align course content with reflective tasks that are both goal and process driven.

The **learner-centered** approach situates the emphasis on the learner and corresponding process learning. Such an approach empowers the student to assume responsibility for his own learning (from the inside out, rather than from the outside in; more freedom to choose, but more responsibility for those choices). In contrast, the instructor's changed role is equally important. Rather than teaching, they need too assume the position of designer, facilitator, mentor and coach.

Principles underlying the learner-centered approach have to do with motivating learners to adopt an active role in the organizing of learning activities. Much of the literature rooted in constructivist theory supports the notion that the active learner needs to build their own knowledge foundation from both previous experiential learning and newly negotiated meaning acquired through self-guided, collaborative problem-based real learning (Jonassen, 1995; 1998). Learners capable of determining their own learning goals experience a higher task completion rate (Jonassen, 1995).

In ideal terms, learners need to understand their context; become aware of their learning choices, the benefits and risks associated with each choice; discern which choice is best for them, in their context and with their goals; acquire the skills, knowledge and confidence which enable them to take control of their learning; and achieve all of this in an individual context, with individual needs, aims and aspirations.

Operational activities require systematic individualized mentoring and feedback. Learning activity and follow-on task assessment should reflect specified learning outcomes. The delivery of materials needs to be flexible, accounting for potential learner-logistical constraints. The use of cognitive and computer tools for problem-solving tasks accompanied by an appropriate level of technical support is necessary.

Communicative Methodology—Where's the fit?

> For most researchers and practicing teachers, a method is a set of
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> theoretical unified classroom techniques thought to be
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> generalized across a wide variety of contexts and audiences.

'Communicative language teaching methodology (CLT) refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning' (Savignon, 2002, p. 1), with a central tenant being that of "communicative competence" (Savignon, 2002; Hadley, 2001), which was proposed by the sociolinguist Hymes in 1972 'based on his criticism of Chomsky's linguistic competence' (Acar, 2005, p. 56), and later strengthened by Canale and Swain in the early 1980s (Beale, 2002). It is no coincidence that the timing and constructs of CLT correspond with the underpinnings of constructivist theory. A substantial amount of the literature on CLT refers to the still unresolved discussion on the meaning of communicative competence, and the distinction between *competence* and *performance*. Acar's (2005, p. 55), in his timely and critical reexamination of the 'communicative competence controversy', challenge Hymes, convincingly positing that *competence for use* is not of the same developmental matrix as *competence for grammar* - a claim that indicates the need for the treatment of competence and performance quite differently.

An adequate understanding of the debate surrounding communicative competence is critical for the practitioner, since it has major implications for syllabus design and hence, directly impacts on the learning context, not least, successful adoption of CLT methodology. For our purpose, we stress the obvious point, that possessing *communicative competence* refers to the 'underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication' (Canale, cited in Beale, 2002, p.1). "'Performance" is observable, and it is only through *performance* that *competence* can be developed, maintained, and evaluated' (Chomsky, cited in Hadley, 2001, p. 4). It then follows that *performance* requires production (Beale, 2002, pp. 3-4 and Dalton), pedagogical

principles of the communicative approach to language teaching for developing 'literacy across the curriculum' are as follows (1998, p. 17):

1. Teaching is learner-centered and responsive to learners' needs and interests.

2. The target language is acquired through interactive communicative use that encourages the negotiation of meaning. The teacher interacts with students in ways that allow for individual preferences for speaking style, such as wait-time, eye contact, turn-taking, spotlighting.

3. Genuinely meaningful language use is emphasized, accompanied by unpredictability, risk-taking, and choice-making. Educators need to assist language development through modeling, eliciting, probing, restating, clarifying, questioning, and praising, as appropriate in purposeful conversation; all the while, providing frequent opportunities for students to interact with each other and themselves during instructional activities.

4. There is exposure to examples of authentic language from the target language community or subject area; learners are encouraged to utilize content vocabulary for communicative competence on content driven topics or themes deemed suitable for the learner.

5. The formal properties of language are never treated in isolation from use; language forms are always addressed within a communicative context. Learners are encouraged to discover the forms and structures of language for themselves.

6. There is a whole language approach to bridging student language with literacy and content area knowledge through activities, and use of strategies that integrate speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.

It should now be evident that communicative language teaching principles are not only connected to theories of language learning, but also substantially intertwined with the curriculum-wide constructivist educational theory, all of which is situated within a grand heuristic paradigm. While there is general acceptance of there no longer being a single best method (Stern, 1985; Nunan, 1991; Richards, 2002), and with the recent movement toward a more integrated approach on all levels (curriculum, theory, method), the fundamental principles of CLT method are no less suitable today in the expanded global community than when they were initially introduced. Admittedly, as Savignon (2002), Brown (2002), Nunan (1991) and others acknowledge, there has been an absence-of-focus on designer methods for specific contexts. However, we submit that this is precisely the challenge practitioners the world over need to embrace especially in today's very mobile intercultural communicative global forum. To conclude on this point, the rationale can be made on two inseparable levels: Congruence between the tenants of the communicative approach and constructivist theory situated within the reigning heuristic paradigm: and, the continued move toward global interdependence, that is *globalization*.

Communicative Competence for a Global Community

In this revisionist era of neo-nationalism, the challenges accompanying the rapid pace of globalization has never been greater. Factors affected by changes in trade, technology,

conflict resolution and ecology are surely among the most significant. One need only attend an education fair to realize that *education* is now viewed as a viable commodity for export by the governments of Canada, Australia, the United States, and New Zealand. This is largely owing to the earlier noted advancements in information technologies and global information infrastructure, which now enable ready and reliable synchronized and a-synchronized communication - the same technologies in use by even the smallest of businesses.

The needs of today's learners in economically both advantaged and disadvantaged countries are referred to by Ingram (2001, p.11) as 'learners' long-term and on-going developmental needs'. Modern day language courses need to not only 'provide diverse experience, but also be coherent and integrated with clearly established goals and objectives' organized around some 'cohering and integrating principle' (2001, p.11). Ingram (2001, pp. 11-12) and others maintain that this requires an approach to methodology which is socially interactive or community-involved, *the global community,* 'both formal and informal, F2F as well as online, with speakers of the target language, and to use the target language for real communicative purposes'… for 'social human interaction'.

The achievement of learner communicative competence, at a time when it is required by present day global development is crucial. CLT methodology, if correctly interpreted and properly integrated, is no less appropriate in modernizing Asian cultural settings, than in so many others. Savignon (2002, pp. 7-8) drawing on her earlier work and that of others (1972, 1983, 1987, 2000; Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Byram,

1986) presents an adapted version of the 'familiar "inverted pyramid classroom model"', which reveals that 'through practice and experience in an increasingly wide range of communicative contexts and events, learners gradually expand their communicative competence, which comprises grammatical competence, discourse competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence' (see fig 1.1 in Savignon, 2002, p. 8). Savignon's inverted pyramid classroom model of communicative language teaching is a contextually flexible and valid approach to communicative competence. It is most appropriate in this era when the need for globally competent speakers of English could not be greater.

The Asian Paradigm Adoption Challenge: Heuristic… NOT Communicative

> "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." - *Albert Einstein*

Ho (1998, p. 1) provides a summary of the 'ELT terrain' in ten Southeast Asian countries that includes the English curricular changes afoot in the various cultures, with a changed emphasis on English teaching methodology. Ho (1988, p. 7) and Hato (2005) identified some general observations that apply almost uniformly across the whole of Asia. Those include his projection that the use of English will continue unabated as the region becomes increasingly 'interdependent in economic matters'. Adding to this is the likelihood that English will eventually become the official language in Lao PDR. It is now the official second language in Taiwan, and will perhaps soon be in a number of other Asian countries including Japan. The majority of Asian countries by now have at least introduced English as a subject into the primary school curriculum (Ho, 1998;

Hato, 2005). The ELT curriculum now 'appears driven, at least in intent' by CLT and skills integration (Ho, 1998, p. 7).

In the more economically advantaged Asian countries, however, (Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and Thailand) where greater access to some form of post-secondary education is assured, competition for entry into prestigious universities is fierce and based almost solely on entrance discrete-point examination scores (Browne, et al, 1998; Zhenhui, 2001). It therefore should come as little surprise that such a focus seems to propagate a heavy reliance on the grammar-translation method of instruction in the high school English classroom; coupled with the use of memorization and rote-learning, devoid of meaningful context. This mirrors the values of a top-down, centralized authoritarian paternalistic and a non-heuristic paradigm-past. There is little incentive for educators to adapt, adopt, and integrate the necessary constituents which are conducive to the broader educational reforms shaping progressive global nations, and even less for learners who will likely go un-rewarded in societies whose leaders pontificate policy reforms with ill-conceived action plans (Hato, 2005; Brown, et al. 1998; Brown, 2004; McKay, 2003; Kadish, 2000). In Japan, where English has been emphasized as a subject of instruction at Japanese junior and senior high schools since the Meiji Restoration of 1868 (Brown, et al, 1998), 2.45 billion yen was earmarked for English public education in 2002 alone (McKay, 2003); and yet TOEFL scores rank Japan 144th (in June 2001) coupled with the well documented 'lack of motivation and general apathy' (McKay, 2003, p. 2), most observers would surely feel compelled to agree with the commonly voiced opinion of Japan's senior citizens - *the old ways no longer seem to work*".

In the case of Thailand, still reeling from the collapse of a social economic policy first initiated some forty years ago, Brown's (2004, p. 2) reintroduction of 'The Four Iddhipada' which detail 'valuable attributes that traditionally have enabled and enriched Thai learners' are certainly worthy of reflection. Borrowing succinctly from Brown, they are as follows: first, will or aspiration, satisfaction and joy of learning; second, the diligent energy, effort and exertion required; third, attending wholeheartedly to learning with active thoughtfulness; fourth, investigation, examination, reasoning and testing of the language being learned. Could these ancient Buddhist teachings equally apply to Japan as well as other Asian contexts? Might they proffer a bridge from those 2,500-year-old values to Sperling's (2001) ecologically grounded adaptation of the heuristic paradigm: a paradigm-to-last which is active on multiple levels?

Conclusion

This submission examines and challenges the limited-in-perspective notion held by instructors of EFL in many Asian settings. It was Jarvis and Atsilarat's (2004) publication in the *Asian EFL Journal* that took issue with the suitability of CLT methodology for the Asian context, which prompted this reflective review of the literature. While it is one matter to question any paradigm, theory or set of theories, or corresponding methodology, it is indeed quite another to dismiss it outright on the basis of some vague findings with an ill-equipped instrument. It is evident that while communicative language teaching principles are connected to theories of language learning, they too are substantially intertwined with curriculum-wide constructivist educational theory, as well as that of other disciplines, all of which is situated within the grand heuristic paradigm. CLT, if correctly interpreted and adequately adopted, is no

less appropriate for modernizing Asian cultural settings, than it is in the context of so many others.

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