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# *The Postmethod Condition: (E)merging Strategies for Second/Foreign Language Teaching*

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Recent explorations in L2 pedagogy signal a shift away from the conventional concept of method toward a "postmethod condition" that can potentially refigure the relationship between theorists and teachers by empowering teachers with knowledge, skill, and autonomy. So empowered, teachers could devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant alternative to method, one informed by principled pragmatism. The postmethod condition can also reshape the character and content of L2 teaching, teacher education, and classroom research. In practical terms, it motivates a search for an open-ended, coherent framework based on current theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical insights that will enable teachers to theorize from practice and practice what they theorize. This paper explores one such framework consisting of 10 macrostrategies, based on which teachers can design varied and situation-specific microstrategies or classroom techniques to effect desired learning outcomes. The paper maintains that the framework can be used to transform classroom practitioners into strategic teachers as well as strategic researchers.

**A**fter swearing by a succession of fashionable language teaching methods and dangling them before a bewildered flock of believers, we seem to have suddenly slipped into a period of robust reflection. In the past few years, we have seen a steady stream of evaluative thoughts on the nature and scope of method (Allwright, 1992; Brown, 1991; Freeman, 1991; Larsen-Freeman, 1990; Pennycook, 1989; Prabhu, 1990; Richards, 1989; Widdowson, 1990). We have also witnessed the emergence of alternative ideas that implicitly redefine our understanding of method (Kumaravadivelu, 1992, 1993a; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Rivers, 1992; Stern, 1992). Not only do these studies caution us against the uncritical acceptance of untested methods, but they counsel us against the search for the best method and indeed against the very concept of method itself.

Underlying the uneasiness that permeates the current climate are two chronic ailments that have long afflicted the body politic of L2 pedagogy: The first relates to a persistent tendency that negates the very essence of intellectual inquiry; the second to a perennial confusion that conflates the distinction between clearly distinguishable entities. Lamenting these two ailments in a classic exposition on the meaning of method, Mackey (1965) observed more than a quarter century ago that “while sciences have advanced by approximations in which each new stage results from an improvement, not rejection, of what has gone before, language-teaching methods have followed the pendulum of fashion from one extreme to the other” (p. 138). He went on to point out that

any meaning of method must first distinguish between what a teacher teaches and what a book teaches. It must not confuse the text used with the teacher using it, or the method with the teaching of it. Method analysis is one thing, therefore; teaching analysis, quite another. Method analysis determines how teaching is done by the book; teaching analysis shows how much is done by the teacher. (p. 139)

The Mackey citation shows that the current bout of diagnostic analysis, like all else in L2 pedagogy, is hardly new. However, there is reason to believe that this time, the treatment may be different. Having witnessed how methods go through endless cycles of life, death, and rebirth, we now seem to have reached a state of heightened awareness—an awareness that as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation. This awareness is fast creating what might be called a postmethod condition.

This paper attempts to make sense of the postmethod condition. I begin by outlining the major characteristics of the postmethod condition implicit in the current literature on L2 teaching methods. I then suggest a strategic framework of L2 teaching that is sensitive to the demands of the postmethod condition. Finally, I discuss possible uses of the framework for L2 teaching and teacher education.

## **THE POSTMETHOD CONDITION**

The postmethod condition is a state of affairs that compels us to refigure the relationship between the theorizers and the practitioners of method. As conceptualizers of philosophical underpinnings governing language pedagogy, theorizers have traditionally occupied the

power center of language pedagogy while the practitioners of classroom teaching have been relegated to the disempowered periphery. If the conventional concept of method entitles theorizers to construct knowledge-oriented theories of pedagogy, the postmethod condition empowers practitioners to construct classroom-oriented theories of practice. If the concept of method authorizes theorizers to centralize pedagogic decision making, the postmethod condition enables practitioners to generate location-specific, classroom-oriented innovative practices.

In practical terms, the postmethod condition signifies several possibilities for redefining the relationship between the center and the periphery. First and foremost, it signifies a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method. Out of the inherent contradictions between method as conceptualized by theorists and method as actualized by practitioners has emerged a need to look beyond the notion of method itself. From the conceptualizer's point of view, each language teaching method in its idealized version consists of a single set of theoretical principles derived from feeder disciplines and a single set of classroom procedures directed at classroom teachers. Thus, there are language-centered methods (e.g., audiolingualism) that seek to provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced linguistic structures through form-focused exercises, assuming that a preoccupation with form will ultimately lead to L2 mastery. The teacher's task is to introduce grammatical structures and vocabulary items one at a time and help learners practice them until they internalize the L2 system. Then, there are learner-centered methods (e.g., communicative methods) that seek to provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced linguistic structures and communicative notions through function-focused activities, assuming that a preoccupation with form and function will ultimately lead to L2 mastery. The teacher's task is to introduce formal and functional items one at a time and help learners practice them until they internalize the L2 system. Finally, there are learning-centered methods (e.g., "the natural approach") that seek to provide opportunities for learners to participate in open-ended meaningful interaction through language learning tasks, assuming that a preoccupation with meaning making will ultimately lead to L2 mastery. The teacher's responsibility is to create conditions in which learners engage in meaningful problem-posing/solving activities.

From the practitioner's point of view, none of these methods can be realized in their purest form in the actual classroom primarily because they are not derived from classroom experience and experimentation but are artificially transplanted into the classroom and, as such, far removed from classroom reality (Nunan, 1991; Pennycook,

1989; Richards, 1989). Furthermore, as the study conducted by Swaffar, Arens, and Morgan (1982) revealed, even syllabus designers and textbook producers do not strictly follow the underlying philosophy of a given method, and more importantly, even teachers who are trained in and claim to follow a particular method do not fully conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures (see also Kumaraavadivelu, 1993a). Confronted with "the complexity of language, learning, and language learners every day of their working lives in a more direct fashion than any theorist does," teachers have developed "the conviction that no single perspective on language, no single explanation for learning, and no unitary view of the contributions of language learners will account for what they must grapple with on a daily basis" (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p. 269). In such circumstances, it is not surprising that all attempts to devise alternative methods have proved to be an exercise in futility.

Secondly, the postmethod condition signifies teacher autonomy. The conventional concept of method "overlooks the fund of experience and tacit knowledge about teaching which the teachers already have by virtue of their lives as students" (Freeman, 1991, pp. 34-35). The postmethod condition, however, recognizes the teachers' potential to know not only how to teach but also know how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks. It also promotes the ability of teachers to know how to develop a reflective approach to their own teaching, how to analyze and evaluate their own teaching practice, how to initiate change in their classroom, and how to monitor the effects of such changes (Richards, 1991; Wallace, 1991). In short, promoting teacher autonomy means enabling and empowering teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they have theorized.

The third characteristic feature of the postmethod condition is principled pragmatism. Principled pragmatism is different from eclecticism which has long been advocated to overcome the limitations of any given method (see Hammerly, 1991, for a recent argument). The proponents of eclecticism aim to promote "the careful, principled combination of sound ideas from sound sources into a harmonious whole that yields the best results" (Hammerly, 1991, p. 18). In spite of such good intentions, eclecticism at the classroom level invariably degenerates into an unsystematic, unprincipled, and uncritical pedagogy because teachers with very little professional preparation to be eclectic in a principled way have little option but to randomly put together a package of techniques from various methods and label it eclectic. As Stern (1992) rightly points out, the "weakness of the eclectic position is that it offers no criteria according to which we can determine which is the best theory, nor does it provide any principles by which

to include or exclude features which form part of existing theories or practices” (p. 11).

Unlike eclecticism, which is constrained by the conventional concept of method, principled pragmatism is based on the pragmatics of pedagogy (Widdowson, 1990), in which “the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization, can only be realized within the domain of application, that is, through the immediate activity of teaching” (p. 30). Principled pragmatism thus focuses on how classroom learning can be shaped and managed by teachers as a result of informed teaching and critical appraisal. One of the ways in which teachers can follow principled pragmatism is by developing what Prabhu (1990) calls, a sense of plausibility. Teachers’ sense of plausibility is their “subjective understanding of the teaching they do. Teachers need to operate with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to desired learning—with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them” (p. 172). This subjective understanding may arise from their own experience as learners and teachers and through professional education and peer consultation. Because teachers’ sense of plausibility is not linked to the concept of method, an important concern is “not whether it implies a good or bad method, but more basically, whether it is active, alive, or operational enough to create a sense of involvement for both the teacher and the student” (p. 173).

The three major characteristics of the postmethod condition outlined above provide the foundation on which a pedagogic framework may be constructed. Such a framework could enable teachers to develop the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant alternative to method that is informed by principled pragmatism. Although the purpose of such a framework is to help teachers become autonomous decision makers, it should, without denying the value of individual autonomy, provide adequate conceptual underpinnings based on current theoretical, empirical, and pedagogic insights so that their teaching act may come about in a principled fashion. In short, it should allow the possibility for activating and developing teachers’ sense of plausibility and create in them a sense of interested involvement.

Keeping such a prerequisite in mind, I present below what I call a “strategic framework for L2 teaching.” The theoretical, empirical, and pedagogic insights needed for constructing the framework are drawn from classroom-oriented research in the areas of L2 learning and teaching. The research perspective adopted here is governed by the belief that any pedagogic framework must emerge from classroom experience and experimentation and is also motivated by the fact that a solid body of classroom research findings are available for consider-

ation and application. It should, however, be recognized that the research path is by no means the only path that has the potential to lead to the construction of a pedagogic framework. There may very well be other possibilities, all equally valid. As an anonymous reviewer rightly pointed out, useful insights could also be drawn from the sociopolitical landscape of teachers and teaching or from work in teacher cognition in school reform, or in general education. The research-based macrostrategic framework is thus offered not as a dogma for uncritical acceptance but as an option for critical appraisal in light of new and expanding experience and experimentation in L2 learning and teaching.

## **A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR L2 TEACHING**

The proposed strategic framework for L2 teaching consists of macrostrategies and microstrategies. Macrostrategies are general plans derived from theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical knowledge related to L2 learning/teaching. A macrostrategy is a broad guideline, based on which teachers can generate their own situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques. In other words, macrostrategies are made operational in the classroom through microstrategies. As I see them, macrostrategies are theory neutral as well as method neutral. Theory neutral does not mean atheoretical; theory neutral means that the framework is not constrained by the underlying assumptions of any one specific theory of language, learning, and teaching. Likewise, method neutral does not mean methodless; rather it means that the framework is not conditioned by a single set of theoretical principles or classroom procedures associated with any one particular language teaching method.

The strategic framework comprises the following 10 macrostrategies: (a) maximize learning opportunities, (b) facilitate negotiated interaction, (c) minimize perceptual mismatches, (d) activate intuitive heuristics, (e) foster language awareness, (f) contextualize linguistic input, (g) integrate language skills, (h) promote learner autonomy, (i) raise cultural consciousness, and (j) ensure social relevance. These macrostrategies are couched in imperative terms only to connote their operational character and not to convey any prescriptive quality. In what follows, I briefly discuss each of these macrostrategies. Because I wish to focus on macrostrategies in this paper, I have not attempted to elaborate on microstrategies in any systematic manner. I have however, where possible, suggested some sources that teachers can draw from in order to design their own microstrategies.

## **Macrostrategy 1: Maximize Learning Opportunities**

It is customary to distinguish teaching acts from learning acts, to view teaching as an activity that creates learning opportunities and learning as an activity that utilizes those opportunities. The first macrostrategy, maximize learning opportunities, however, envisages teaching as a process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities. If we, as we must, treat classroom activity as a social event jointly constructed by teachers and learners (Breen, 1985), then teachers ought to be both creators of learning opportunities and utilizers of learning opportunities created by learners.

As creators of learning opportunities, it is crucial that teachers strike a balance between their role as planners of teaching acts and their role as mediators of learning acts. The former involves a priori judgment based on, among other things, learners' level of proficiency and general learning objectives, whereas the latter involves an ongoing assessment of how well learners cope with the developing classroom event. Creation of effective learning opportunities thus entails a willingness on the part of teachers to modify their lesson plans continuously on the basis of feedback. This can be done only if teachers treat a predetermined syllabus as a presyllabus that is to be reconstructed to meet specific learner needs, wants, and situations and treat a prescribed text as a pretext that is to be used as a springboard for launching classroom activities.

As utilizers of learning opportunities created by learners, it is critical that teachers no longer see "teachers simply as teachers, and learners simply as learners, because both are, for good or ill, managers of learning" (Allwright, 1984, p. 156). Because the production of classroom discourse is a cooperative venture, teachers cannot afford to ignore any contributory discourse from other partners jointly engaged in the process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities. In a class of learners with near-homogenous language ability, every time a learner indicates any difficulty in understanding linguistic or propositional content of the lesson, we can assume that there may be other learners who experience a similar difficulty. Therefore, not bringing a particular learner's problem to the attention of the class indicates a failure on the part of the teacher to utilize the learning opportunity created by the learner.

## **Macrostrategy 2: Facilitate Negotiated Interaction**

This macrostrategy refers to meaningful learner-learner, learner-teacher interaction in class. Negotiated interaction means that the learner should be actively involved in clarification, confirmation, com-



prehension checks, requests, repairing, reacting, and turn taking. It also means that the learner should be given the freedom and encouragement to initiate talk, not just react and respond to it.

Although research has not yet conclusively demonstrated any causal relationship between negotiated interaction and language development, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that L2 learners need to be provided with opportunities for negotiated interaction in order to accelerate their comprehension and production. Studies on interactional modifications that began with the solid lead given by Long (1981) and continued by Pica and her colleagues (see, e.g., Pica, 1987, 1992; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987) demonstrate that what enables learners to move beyond their current receptive and expressive capacities are opportunities to modify and restructure their interaction with their interlocutors until mutual comprehension is reached. These findings have been strengthened by studies on learner output (Pica, Holliday, Lewis, & Morgenthaler, 1989; Schmidt & Frota, 1986; Swain, 1985) which show that production, as opposed to comprehension, may very well be the trigger that forces learners to pay attention to form, to the relationship between form and meaning, and to the overall means of communication.

Negotiated interaction can be facilitated through several microstrategies. Designing group activities is one of them. Small-group arrangements by nature produce more negotiated interaction than do teacher-fronted activities and research shows that nonnative/nonnative partners produce more frequent negotiations of meaning than do native/nonnative partners (Varonis & Gass, 1985). Asking referential questions which permit open-ended responses, rather than display questions which have predetermined answers, is another microstrategy that can generate meaningful exchanges among the participants (Brock, 1986). Yielding greater topic control to the learner is yet another microstrategy that provides an effective basis for building conversations. Learners benefit more from self-initiated and peer-initiated topics than from topics nominated by their teachers (Slimani, 1989). Yielding control over the topic is a way of tapping learners' intrinsic motivation, of ensuring an appropriate level of linguistic input, and of stimulating extensive and complex production on the part of the learner (Ellis, 1992).

### **Macrostrategy 3: Minimize Perceptual Mismatches**

An important factor that will determine the relative success or failure of negotiated interaction in the classroom is the perceptual match or mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation. What impact classroom activities will have on the learning process depends as

much on learner interpretation as on teacher intention. It is, therefore, essential to sensitize ourselves to the potential sources of mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation.

There are at least 10 potential sources of perceptual mismatch that we should be aware of. Each of these has been discussed in detail in Kumaravadivelu (1991); I shall, therefore, provide only a brief description here:

1. Cognitive: a source which refers to the knowledge of the world and mental processes through which learners obtain conceptual understanding of physical and natural phenomena.
2. Communicative: a source which refers to skills through which learners exchange messages, including the use of communication strategies.
3. Linguistic: a source which refers to linguistic repertoire—syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic knowledge of the target language—that is minimally required to participate in classroom activities.
4. Pedagogic: a source which refers to teacher/learner recognition of stated or unstated, short- and/or long-term objective(s) of classroom activities.
5. Strategic: a source which refers to learning strategies, that is, operations, steps, plans, and routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information.
6. Cultural: a source which refers to prior knowledge of the target cultural norms minimally required for the learner to understand classroom activities.
7. Evaluative: a source which refers to articulated or unarticulated types and modes of ongoing self-evaluation measures used by learners to monitor their classroom performance.
8. Procedural: a source which refers to stated or unstated paths chosen by the learner to achieve an immediate goal. Procedural source pertains to locally specified, currently identified, bottom-up tactics which seek a quick resolution to a specific problem at hand, whereas strategic source, mentioned earlier, pertains to broad-based, higher-level, top-down strategies which seek an overall solution to a general language learning situation.
9. Instructional: a source which refers to instructional directions given by the teacher and/or indicated by the textbook writer to help learners achieve their goal(s).
10. Attitudinal: a source which refers to participants' attitudes toward the nature of L2 learning and teaching, the nature of the classroom culture, and the nature of participant role relationships.

We may not be able to and, in fact, do not have to identify and deal with all these sources of mismatch in real time as the classroom event unfolds. However, an awareness of these mismatches can help us effectively intervene whenever we notice or whenever learners indicate problems in carrying out a specified classroom activity.

### **Macrostrategy 4: Activate Intuitive Heuristics**

From time to time, scholars have raised doubts as to whether an L2 system can be neatly analyzed and explicitly explained to learners with the view to aiding grammar construction (Krashen, 1985; Prabhu, 1987; Rutherford, 1987). They question the feasibility as well as the desirability of such an exercise. Their concern echoes the Chomskyan premise that one cannot learn the entire gamut of the grammatical structure of a language through explanation and instruction beyond the rudimentary level, for the simple reason that no one has enough explicit knowledge about the structure to provide adequate explanation and instruction. They contend that teachers can assist their learners' adequate grammar construction best by designing classroom activities "in such a way as to give free play to those creative principles that humans bring to the process of language learning . . . [and] create a rich linguistic environment for the intuitive heuristics that the normal human being automatically possesses" (Macintyre, 1970, p. 108). Although one can question the adequacy of an L2 teaching operation based entirely on such an assumption, one can hardly overstate the need to activate the intuitive heuristics of the learner as part of an overall teaching strategy.

One way to activate the intuitive heuristics of the learner is to provide enough textual data so that the learner can infer certain underlying grammatical rules. A good deal of grammatical information can be conveyed not directly through rules but indirectly through examples. Learners should be encouraged to find the rule-governing pattern in the examples provided. They should encounter the linguistic structure several times so that "the design of the language may be observed, and its meaning (structural, lexical, and sociocultural) inductively absorbed from its use in such varying situations" (Rivers, 1964, p. 152). Empirical studies show that self-discovery affects learners' comprehension and retention more favorably than explicit presentation of underlying structural patterns regardless of the learners' language ability (Shaffer, 1989).

### **Macrostrategy 5: Foster Language Awareness**

The emphasis on activating the intuitive heuristics of the learner is not meant to proscribe explicit presentation of underlying structures

wherever feasible and desirable. Such a presentation has the potential to induce learning processes if it is done to foster language awareness in the learner. Language awareness (LA) as a concept combines the notions of consciousness-raising (Rutherford, 1987; Sharwood Smith, 1981) and input enhancement (Sharwood Smith, 1991). It is generally defined as a person's sensitivity to and awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life (Hawkins, 1984; James & Garret, 1991). In the specific context of L2 learning and teaching, it refers to the deliberate attempt to draw learners' attention to the formal properties of their L2 in order to increase the degree of explicitness required to promote L2 learning.

As Rutherford (1987) points out, fostering LA (he calls it consciousness-raising) in the learner is different from traditional notions of grammar teaching in fundamental ways. The concept of LA treats grammar as a network of systems to be interacted with rather than a body of structures to be mastered. As exemplified by grammatical exercises included in Rutherford (1987), grammar is treated as a means to L2 development, not an end. The traditional grammar teaching is teacher oriented, linear, and hierarchical; LA-based teaching is learner oriented, cyclic, and holistic. Grammar-based strategies emphasize memory, specific rules, and rule articulation; LA-based strategies emphasize understanding, general principles, and operational experience.

Recent empirical studies (Allen, Swain, Harley, & Cummins, 1990; Gass, 1991; Lightbown, 1991) suggest that LA-based strategies have greater intellectual appeal and instructional applicability than strictly grammar-based strategies. These studies show that the presence of LA-based activities can speed up the rate of learning while their absence can contribute to fossilization. Furthermore, as Sharwood Smith (1991) points out, LA (he calls it input enhancement) can be created externally by the teacher through teaching strategies and internally by the learner through learning process. LA-based strategies also help learners sensitize themselves to aspects of the L2 which would otherwise pass unnoticed and unlearn initial incorrect analyses by supplying negative evidence (Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Schmidt, 1993; White, Spada, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991).

### **Macrostrategy 6: Contextualize Linguistic Input**

Nearly a century ago, Sweet (1899/1964) argued that "the main foundation of the practical study of language should be connected texts" (p. 100). Prior to him, Vietor (cited in Howatt, 1984) had suggested that words should be presented in sentences, and sentences should be practiced in meaningful contexts rather than taught as iso-

lated, disconnected elements. Sweet and Vietor anticipated what we now know from psycholinguistic research: Syntax is largely a structural device that signals semantic relationships which are, in turn, governed by discursal and pragmatic features. Sentence comprehension and production, therefore, involve rapid and simultaneous integration of syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discourse phenomena.

Studies in L2 development show that the acquisition of syntax is constrained in part by pragmatics (Zobl, 1984), that the phonological forms L2 learners produce depend crucially on the content of discourse (Avery, Ehrlich, & Yorio, 1985), and that syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features cannot be understood as isolated linguistic components with a unidirectional information flow (Gass, 1986). It is thus essential to bring to the learner's attention the integrated nature of language. One way of doing this is to contextualize linguistic input so that learners can see language "as a comprehensive conglomerate, uniting all the levels of structure or rule complexes of a language, viz., the structure of words and phrases, the structure of sentences, the structure of texts and the structure of interaction" (Dirven, 1990, pp. 7–8).

From these investigations, we learn that linguistic input should be contextualized for learners to benefit from the interactive effects of various linguistic components. Introducing isolated, discrete items will result in pragmatic dissonance, depriving the learner of necessary pragmatic cues and rendering the process of meaning making harder. Contrary to the widely held view, the responsibility for contextualizing linguistic input lies more with the classroom teacher than with the syllabus designer or the textbook writer. Research reveals that regardless of what textbooks profess, it is the teacher who can succeed or fail in creating contexts that encourage meaning making in the classroom (Walz, 1989). Microstrategies that help the teacher promote syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic use of language can be derived from, among others, language learning scenarios (Di Pietro, 1987), problem-solving tasks (Brown & Palmer, 1988), simulation and gaming role plays (Crookall & Oxford, 1990), and discourse-based activities suggested in Cook (1989) and Hatch (1992).

## **Macrostrategy 7: Integrate Language Skills**

The nature of L2 learning involves not merely an integration of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic components of language but also an integration of language skills traditionally identified and sequenced as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is true that the four language skills are still widely used in isolation as the fundamental organizing principle for curricular and materials design. It is done,

however, more for logistical than for logical reasons. Our discomfort with the practice has surfaced from time to time in our attempt to group the skills in terms of active (speaking and writing) and passive (listening and reading) skills and later as productive and receptive skills. As Savignon (1990) points out, “lost in this encode/decode, message-sending representation is the collaborative nature of meaning-making” (p. 207).

Skill separation is in fact a remnant of the audiolingual era and has very little empirical or theoretical justification. It is a pedagogical artifact that has been shown to be inadequate for developing integrated functional skills (Swaffar, Arens, & Morgan, 1982; Titone, 1985). Its inadequacy arises because language skills are essentially interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Fragmenting them into manageable, atomistic items runs counter to the parallel and interactive nature of language and language behavior. Besides, the learning and use of any one skill can trigger cognitive and communicative associations with others. Reading exposure alone, for instance, may be “the primary means of developing reading comprehension, writing style, and more sophisticated vocabulary and grammar” (Krashen, 1989, p. 90). Similarly, listening activities help to make the broader connection between an integrated sociolinguistic concept of form and function and psycholinguistic processes of interpretation and expression (Rost, 1990). Furthermore, as we learn from the whole language movement, language knowledge and language ability are best developed when language is learned and used holistically (Rigg, 1991).

Classroom research indicates that learners do not focus on one skill at a time in predictable and invariant ways. An empirical look at the integration and separation of language skills in the L2 classroom (Selinker & Tomlin, 1986) shows that even if the teacher follows textbooks that seek to promote serial integration, where learners are supposed to move gradually from one language skill to another, what actually happens in the classroom is parallel integration, where learners use language skills in different combinations. Classroom activity seems to be much more complicated in terms of skill integration than envisioned by either the textbook writer or the teacher. Although more classroom-oriented research is required to determine the full impact of integration/separation of skills, all available empirical, theoretical, and pedagogical information points to the need to integrate language skills for effective language teaching.

## **Macrostrategy 8: Promote Learner Autonomy**

Because language learning is largely an autonomous activity, promoting learner autonomy is vitally important. It involves helping learn-

ers learn how to learn, equipping them with the means necessary to self-direct their own learning, raising the consciousness of good language learners about the learning strategies they seem to possess intuitively, and making the strategies explicit and systematic so that they are available to improve the language learning abilities of other learners as well. In short, it involves promoting "strategic investment of learners in their own linguistic destinies" (Brown, 1991, p. 256).

A series of studies focusing on learner autonomy (Cohen, 1990; Dickinson, 1987; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Wenden & Rubin, 1987) has provided us with useful insights into what learners know and do to regulate their learning and what teachers should know and can do to promote learner autonomy. We learn from these strategies that in addition to generic metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies that learners follow, there are many individual ways of learning a language successfully and that different learners will approach language learning differently. We learn that more effective learners use a greater variety of strategies and use them in ways appropriate to the language learning task and that less effective learners not only have fewer strategy types in their repertoire but also frequently use strategies that are inappropriate to the task.

Steps to promote learner autonomy include psychological preparation and strategic training. Owing to past experience, adult L2 learners tend to bring with them preconceived notions about what constitutes learning and what constitutes teaching and prior expectations about what constrains learner and teacher role relationships in the classroom. A primary task of the teacher wishing to promote learner autonomy is to help learners take responsibility for their learning and bring about necessary attitudinal changes in them. This psychological preparation should be combined with strategic training that helps learners understand what the learning strategies are, how to use them for accomplishing various problem-posing and problem-solving tasks, how to monitor their performance, and how to assess the outcome of their learning. Microstrategies for promoting learner autonomy can be designed from a wealth of suggestions given in, among others, Dickinson (1987), Ellis & Sinclair (1989), Oxford (1990), and Wenden (1991).

### **Macrostrategy 9: Raise Cultural Consciousness**

Culture teaching has always been an integral part of L2 teaching. Traditionally, it is aimed at creating in the L2 learner an awareness of and an empathy toward the culture of the L2 community. According to a recent review by Stern (1992), culture teaching has included a

cognitive component in terms of geographical knowledge, knowledge about the contributions of the target culture to world civilization, and knowledge about differences in the way of life as well as an understanding of values and attitudes in the L2 community; an affective component in terms of interest, curiosity, and empathy; and a behavioral component in terms of learners' ability to interpret culturally relevant behavior and to conduct themselves in culturally appropriate ways. Thus, as Stern reiterates, "one of the most important aims of culture teaching is to help the learner gain an understanding of the native speaker's perspective" (p. 216). The teacher's task then is to help the learner "create a network of mental associations similar to those which the items evoke in the native speaker" (p. 224).

Although such a traditional approach to culture teaching may be adequate for helping learners develop sociocultural competence, it seems to me that it can offer only a limited and limiting view of cultural consciousness. It ignores the fact that most L2 classes are not monocultural cocoons but rather multicultural mosaics in which cultural knowledge is likely to diverge based on learners' cultural and linguistic background as well as ethnic heritage, class, age, and gender (Tannen, 1992). Such diversity is seldom explored or exploited for purposes of learning and teaching.

Raising cultural consciousness minimally requires that instead of privileging the teacher as the sole cultural informant, we treat the learner as a cultural informant as well. By treating learners as cultural informants, we can encourage them to engage in a process of participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge. We can do so by identifying the cultural knowledge learners bring to the classroom and by using it to help them share their own individual perspectives with the teacher as well as other learners whose lives, and hence perspectives, differ from theirs (Swaffar, 1991; Walters, 1992). We can do so by taking our learners on the path of "cultural versatility" if we "structure tasks and assignments so as to . . . elicit a synthesis between the learner, the learner's home culture, and the target cultural objective" (Robinson, 1991, p. 118). Such a multicultural approach can also dispel stereotypes that create and sustain cross-cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications. Furthermore, "by considering learners as informants, we both raise their self-esteem and provide a context in which content rather than form is the focus of instruction and interaction" (Murray, 1992, p. 260). Sources that suggest practical ideas for accessing, responding, and building on learners' vast cultural knowledge in order to establish a common ground for integrating the target language and culture include Kramsch (1993), Murray (1992), Robinson (1991), and Scarcella (1992).



## **Macrostrategy 10: Ensure Social Relevance**

Social relevance refers to the need for teachers to be sensitive to the societal, political, economic, and educational environment in which L2 learning/teaching takes place. Any serious attempt to understand L2 learning/teaching necessarily entails an understanding of social context as an important variable (Beebe, 1985; Berns, 1990; Breen, 1985; Kachru, 1985; Lowenberg, 1990; Wong Fillmore, 1989). L2 learning/teaching is not a discrete activity; it is deeply embedded in the larger societal context that has a profound effect on it. The social context shapes various learning/teaching issues such as the motivation for L2 learning, the goal of L2 learning, the functions an L2 is expected to perform at home and in the community, the availability of input to the learner, the variation in the input, and the norms of proficiency acceptable to that particular speech community. It is impossible to insulate classroom life from the dynamics of social institutions. Teaching, therefore, makes little sense if it is not informed by social relevance.

Learning purpose and language use are perhaps most crucial in determining the social relevance of an L2 program. As Berns (1990) illustrates, different social contexts contribute to the emergence of various communicative competences and functions in an L2 speech community, thereby influencing L2 learning and use in significantly different ways. In these contexts, the target language plays a role that is complementary or supplementary to the local/regional language(s). The competences and functions invariably determine the nature and quality of input that is available to the learner. Most often, learners are not exposed to the full range of their L2 in all its complexity that one would expect in a context where it is used as the primary vehicle of communication. In this international use of an L2, "the learner is not becoming an imitation native speaker, but a person who can stand between the two languages, using both when appropriate" (Cook, 1992, p. 583).

The immediate concern facing the classroom teacher is whether to pursue a realistic goal of producing competent speakers with adequate communicative ability or an unrealistic goal of producing imitation native speakers. If we believe that L2 programs "must be solidly anchored in sociopragmatics" (Valdman, 1992, p. 88) reflecting the functional use of language embedded in local communicative situations, then the goal L2 learners and teachers need to pursue in most cases "should be intelligibility and acceptability rather than native-like perfection" (Stern, 1992, p. 116). From a microstrategic point of view, such a goal should inform the teacher's decision making in terms of appropriate instructional materials, evaluation measures, and target competence.

## USES OF THE FRAMEWORK

The strategic framework outlined above is not a closed set of formulae but rather an open-ended set of options. It represents a descriptive, not a prescriptive scheme. It opposes methodological absolutes and supports strategic relativism. It is meant to be treated not as a fixed package of ready-made solutions but rather as an interim plan to be continually modified, expanded, and enriched by classroom teachers based on ongoing feedback. Through further experience and experimentation, the boundaries of the framework can be extended beyond the 10 macrostrategies identified in this paper.

Preliminary investigations (Kumaravadivelu, 1993a, 1993b) using a subset of macrostrategies indicate that the strategic framework can be used to transform classroom practitioners into strategic teachers and strategic researchers. Strategic teachers spend a considerable amount of time and effort (a) reflecting on the specific needs, wants, situations, and processes of learning and teaching; (b) stretching their knowledge, skill, and attitude to stay informed and involved; (c) exploring and extending macrostrategies to meet the challenges of changing contexts of teaching; (d) designing appropriate microstrategies to maximize learning potential in the classroom; and (e) monitoring their ability to react to myriad situations in meaningful ways.

As strategic researchers, teachers can use the framework to develop investigative capabilities required for action research focusing on classroom discourse analysis for self-observation and self-assessment. By regularly audio/videotaping their own classroom performance and by using macrostrategies as interpretive strategies, they can analyze classroom input and interaction to assess how successful they have been in facilitating negotiated interaction, in integrating language skills, in contextualizing linguistic input, and so forth. Such action research will help teachers generate empirically grounded, practice-oriented microstrategies and also enable them to develop their own practical theory of language pedagogy.

## CONCLUSION

This paper began with the premise that the widespread dissatisfaction with the conventional concept of method has produced what I have called a postmethod condition. By effecting a reformulation of the terms of our debate and propelling us beyond the conventional concept of method, the postmethod condition can potentially reshape the character and content of L2 teaching, teacher education, and class-

room research. It can empower teachers with the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant alternative to method that is informed by principled pragmatism.

In practical terms, the postmethod condition creates the need for an open-ended, coherent framework based on current theoretical, empirical, and pedagogic insights that will activate and develop teachers' sense of plausibility and create in them a sense of interested involvement. This paper explored one such framework consisting of 10 macrostrategies, based on which teachers can design varied and situation-specific microstrategies to effect desired learning outcomes. The paper also indicated that the proposed strategic framework has the potential to transform classroom practitioners into strategic teachers and strategic researchers. Clearly, the ultimate worth of such a framework is to be found in how well it strikes a balance between giving teachers the guidance they need and want and the independence they deserve and desire.

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