

‘Required Reading’: the Study of ‘Global’ EFL Coursebook Pedagogy

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In recent years, a growing literature devoted to the study of the ‘global’ EFL (GEFL) coursebook¹ has developed within applied linguistics. However, its overall perspective is one of considerable scepticism about the potential of such teaching materials, as currently constituted, for facilitating language learning. Rather, the view is taken that the perceived deficiencies of most GEFL coursebooks could and should be remedied by the adoption of up-to-date insights from applied linguistics concerning the nature of language and language learning.

However, this view precludes the possibility that a sound rationale for current GEFL coursebook pedagogy may exist. With reference to the language knowledge teaching component of typical GEFL coursebook pedagogy, this paper therefore first of all explores a body of research and theorizing from outside applied linguistics concerned with i) the role of long-term memory of factual information in skilled performance, and ii) how long-term memorization of factual knowledge can best be facilitated. This is followed by a review of additional items from within the applied linguistics literature. Both literatures are seen to provide strong empirical and theoretical evidence for the soundness of the area of GEFL coursebook pedagogy in question. In conclusion, it is argued that the applied linguistics critique of other areas of GEFL coursebook pedagogy should be similarly re-evaluated.

‘Der gesunde Menschenverstand ist der Menschheit Genie.’
(‘Common-sense is the genius of ordinary people.’)

Goethe

1 Introduction

Until relatively recently, applied linguistics has tended to ignore the ‘global’ EFL (GEFL) coursebook, despite its long-standing central importance in ELT. An early exception to this trend was Allwright’s influential article (Allwright 1981), but it has only been from the late 1990s onwards that a reasonably sizea-

¹ By the ‘global’ EFL (GEFL) coursebook is meant published teaching materials in widespread international use, aimed primarily at high school-age and/or young adult learners of English as a foreign language. Well-known examples of coursebooks of this kind include series such as ‘Interchange’ (e.g., Richards, Hull & Proctor 2005), ‘Project’ (e.g., Hutchinson 2008), ‘Headway’ (e.g., Soars & Soars 2009), and so on. Such coursebooks are the primary focus of this paper. However, its concerns are also regarded as of potential relevance to the study of ‘local’ EFL coursebooks aimed at similar audiences, given the influence that GEFL coursebooks have tended to have on the pedagogy of many such publications (cf. Waters 2012).

ble book-length literature has begun to accumulate. This relatively slow awakening of interest can be seen as having been occasioned at least in part by the dominant overall attitude evinced in Allwright's article, and in most subsequent publications, viz., one of considerable scepticism about the pedagogical merits of GEFL coursebooks.

This academic stance has been adopted primarily on the grounds that most GEFL coursebooks have been seen as paying only lip-service to or ignoring completely most of the main recent conceptual developments in applied linguistics, such as English as an International Language, critical theory-based views of coursebook content, task-based learning, and so on (see, e.g., Jenkins 2007; Gray 2010; Tomlinson 2013). For example, in Tomlinson (2013: 12-18), several recent GEFL coursebooks are evaluated in terms of a list of theoretical principles derived from SLA studies. Because of their perceived failure to meet most of these criteria, none of the books is awarded more than 19 out of a possible maximum of 50 points, i.e., they are all given relatively low ratings.

On the other hand, it also needs to be acknowledged that some of the literature on the topic has given voice to alternative, more nuanced perspectives, e.g., Bell & Gower (1998); Mares (2003); Littlewood (2004); Prodromou & Mishan (2008); Harwood (2014); Timmis (2014); Hadley (2014). Nevertheless, such items can be regarded as exceptions to the general tenor of the discussion, which has and continues to be overwhelmingly critical of standard GEFL coursebook fare. But such an overall view can itself be criticised because of its predominantly 'applied science' (Wallace 1991) or 'linguistics applied' (Widdowson 2000) character: in other words, it suffers from the flaw of proceeding only in a largely top-down fashion, based on the assumption that GEFL coursebook pedagogy can best be improved by an infusion of up-to-date academic ideas.

An approach of this kind begs at least two fundamental questions. Firstly, it assumes that the academic ideas in question are ones which are capable of being translated into sound GEFL coursebook-based pedagogy. But as Timmis (2014: 257) says, "there isn't enough relevant theoretical evidence to justify the unquestioning application of theory to practice" (cf. Hadley 2014: 214-215). Similarly, Spada (2015: 78) argues that much of the research and theorising which supports the kind of pedagogy most frequently advocated by applied linguistics - e.g., "implicit linguistic knowledge is the primary goal in SLA" - is actually of only limited potential relevance to language teaching, because "the development of implicit knowledge requires extensive input over long periods of time - two requirements that most L2 teaching contexts do not meet". As she goes on to say:

We need to refrain from making ‘leaps in logic’ [...] by misapplying research that was carried out in one context to another. We also need to be careful not to make assumptions that what is relevant to SLA researchers, even classroom SLA researchers, is relevant to L2 teachers and learners. (Spada 2015: 79).

The second assumption made by the prevailing academic critique of the GEFL coursebook is the obverse, i.e., that because the kind of pedagogy it tends to embody conflicts with the ideas of applied linguistics, it must perforce be regarded as only ‘folklorist-’ or ‘common-sense’-based, and therefore ‘unscientific’. But it is also surely plausible that the reverse is the case, that is, that tacit practitioner ‘know-how’, developed on the basis of lengthy first-hand classroom experience, may create forms of pedagogy which incorporate important insights into the nature of (language) learning that have tended to be overlooked or have not yet been identified by applied linguistics (cf. Polanyi 1973; Eraut 1994). As Chomsky (1988: 180) puts it:

People who are involved in some practical activity such as teaching languages, translation, or building bridges should probably keep an eye on what’s happening in the sciences. But they probably shouldn’t take it too seriously because the capacity to carry out practical activities without much conscious awareness of what you’re doing is usually far more advanced than scientific knowledge.

And as Cumming (2008: 287) says of Chomsky’s views: “This remark is telling [...] the practices of teaching English constitute their own kinds of knowledge”.

The purpose of this paper is to explore Cumming’s proposition in relation to the study of ELT coursebooks of the kind in question. In other words, it looks at the existing pedagogy of GEFL coursebooks in its own right, in a deliberately open-minded way, in order to consider whether its predominance in the world of ELT practice may be because it is actually both theoretically well-motivated and empirically justified, however much it conflicts with currently fashionable views within parts of the applied linguistics discourse. To put it another way, and to paraphrase Milton², it is an attempt ‘to justify the ways of GEFL coursebooks to applied linguistics’.

In doing so, I will begin by reviewing a body of literature concerning research findings from outside applied linguistics, one which offers support for aspects of GEFL coursebook pedagogy, but which applied linguistics does not appear to have so far taken into account. I will then review several further studies, this

² Cf. “To justify the ways of God to men”, l. 26, John Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

time from within applied linguistics, which can be seen, like the first body of work, to also provide support for GEFL coursebook pedagogy, but which the applied linguistics coursebook critique makes little or no reference to. For reasons of space, and because of its importance, the focus will be limited to the teaching of language knowledge³ aspect of GEFL coursebook pedagogy. Nevertheless, *mutatis mutandis*, the implications should be of relevance to approaches to the academic study of several other main elements of GEFL coursebook pedagogy as well.

2 Approaches to teaching language knowledge

Before coming to the first part of the literature review just described, however, it is first of all necessary to briefly ‘set the scene’ by outlining what, on the one hand, can be seen to constitute the predominant view within applied linguistics concerning the optimum form which teaching language knowledge pedagogy should take, and, on the other, what seems to constitute the approach to be found in the majority of GEFL coursebooks.

As shown in a recent survey of trends and issues in ELT methodology over the preceding 15 years or so (Waters 2012), applied linguistics, in overall terms, nowadays favours a ‘communicating to learn’ approach in this matter. It places its main language knowledge teaching pedagogical emphasis, in other words, on meaning-making activities out of which language knowledge learning opportunities arise, leading to language knowledge either being acquired implicitly, as part of communicative interaction, and/or being briefly focused on more explicitly in a ‘just-in-time’ or a retrospective, awareness-raising manner. Rarely if ever is there any ‘up-front’, ‘explicit’ prior focus on the systematic teaching of language knowledge. Examples of methods based on this form of pedagogy include the ‘strong’ form of the Communicative Approach (Howatt 1984: 279), ‘task-based learning’ (e.g., Willis 1996), ‘text-driven’ materials development (Tomlinson 2003: Ch. 6), and so on.

Contrastingly, Waters (2012) also shows that the dominant form of GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching pedagogy is in most respects of a ‘learning to communicate’ nature. In this approach, units of work focus primarily on the systematic, explicit teaching of a prescribed set of language knowledge items, accompanied by copious guided ‘practice’ exercises. Sometimes also in-

³ By the teaching of ‘language knowledge’ is meant a focus on grammar, vocabulary and so on, as well as information about such language (e.g., explanations of grammatical rules).

cluded is a related subsequent communication task element, in which freer practice of the language knowledge items is given. Methods associated with this approach include ‘presentation, practice and production’ (PPP), the ‘weak’ form of the Communicative Approach (Howatt 1984: 279), ‘task-supported learning’ (Ellis 2003: Ch. 8), and so forth.

It is obvious that these two approaches differ markedly, and as Waters (2012) also shows (cf. Waters 2009), the degree of divergence appears, if anything, to be widening, with GEFL coursebooks including an increasing amount of ‘up front’ language work. The prevailing view within the applied linguistics literature on the topic is highly critical of this trend, on the grounds, as already mentioned, that evidence from second language acquisition studies supports a ‘communicating to learn’ model and casts doubt on the efficacy of a ‘learning to communicate’ approach. For example, as Skehan (1996: 18) puts it:

The underlying theory for a PPP approach has now been discredited. The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization [...] no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology.

Similarly, and with specific reference to GEFL coursebooks, Tomlinson (2003: 8) says:

There is a return to the ‘central place of grammar in the language curriculum’... which goes against many of the findings of Second Language Acquisition Research.

Nevertheless, as the following sections hope to show, there is a body of evidence, so far largely ignored or insufficiently acknowledged by much of applied linguistics, which presents a very different picture, making it possible to query the claimed superiority for the teaching of language knowledge of a ‘communicating to learn’ approach, and providing strong support instead for a ‘learning to communicate’ approach in the matter.

3 The importance of long-term memory in the learning of language knowledge

The starting point for presenting the body of evidence in question is a consideration of the role of long-term memory of factual information in ‘skilled performance’. This is because, as will be seen, such knowledge is a crucial factor in the ability to successfully undertake a wide range of everyday problem-solving tasks, including communicating in a foreign language. Awareness of this finding leads logically to the second main matter to be considered, the vitally important

issue of what form of pedagogy is most likely to facilitate the acquisition of factual knowledge by long-term memory.

Firstly, then, evidence of the importance for skilled performance of factual information held in long-term memory is provided very clearly in research by De Groot (1966) and Chase & Simon (1973), concerning expert versus less-expert chess players, and conveniently summarised in Sweller et al. (1998: 253-255; cf. Kirschner et al., 2006: 76-77). In De Groot's study, the two groups of players in question were very briefly shown a number of real-life chess-board layouts. When asked to subsequently reproduce the board configurations, the expert players were successful in doing so in the majority of cases. However, the non-expert players were able to do so in far fewer cases.

In Chase and Simon's subsequent study, in order to investigate whether the difference in recall noted could be attributed to expert players possessing superior short-term memory capabilities, the two groups were once again briefly shown a number of chess-board layouts, but this time of a random, non-real world nature. The ability to reproduce these layouts was found to be similar for both groups of players. These results indicated that the differences in recall observed in De Groot's research could not be due to the better short-term memories of the expert players. Rather, the explanation was attributed to the superior long-term memory by the experts of the thousands of chess-board configurations they had encountered as a result of the very large number of games they had played over the years.

This knowledge was taken to have enabled them to recognize 'at a glance' and subsequently recall the various configurations shown to them in the first part of the study. By the same token, this knowledge was not available to them when attempting to recall the second set of configurations, due the random nature of that set of layouts. As Sweller et al. (1998: 254) explain, it is this same long-term memory of thousands of real-life chess-board configurations which enables the experts to play chess so effectively, since their short-term memory is not burdened with constantly having to come to terms with each change in the layout of the board afresh, in the manner of less expert players.

Kirschner et al. (2006: 83; cf. Sweller et al., 1998: 255-256) point out that the main reason why long-term memory of factual information, such as of chess-board configurations, frees up vital short-term memory resources in this way, and thereby facilitates skilled performance, is because such knowledge undergoes the twin processes of 'schematization' and 'automation'. 'Schematisation' occurs when items of information, originally stored in isolation in long-term

memory, are combined together into larger networks of knowledge, and therefore can be retrieved as such, rather than only individually. This process also operates with respect to individual schemas as well, not just individual items of knowledge. Thus, schemas involving relatively ‘lower-level’ knowledge can combine with ones involving ‘higher-level’ knowledge, forming new, increasingly complex schemas. For example, as Sweller et al. (1998: 255) explain:

In early school years, children construct schemas for letters that allow them to classify an infinite variety of shapes (as occurs in hand writing) (sic) into a very limited number of categories. These schemas provide the elements for higher order schemas when they are combined into words that in turn can be combined into phrases, and so forth. Ultimately, this process allows readers to rapidly scan a page filled with a hugely complex array of squiggles and derive meaning from it.

As a result of such processes, massive quantities of information can be retrieved from long-term memory in ‘one fell swoop’, consequently avoiding short-term memory overload and releasing its resources for the demands of real-time skilled performance instead.

‘Automation’ is the process whereby information stored in long-term memory can be recalled unconsciously. Knowledge is transformed in this way through repeated practical application, as in, e.g., learning to play the piano or drive a car. What initially takes a good deal of conscious effort and, thus, use of short-term memory resources, is gradually ‘routinised’, so that the behaviour can be carried out without conscious thought. As a consequence, as Sweller et al. (1998: 257-258) say:

Learners who have a more automated schema have more working memory capacity available to use the schema to solve more sophisticated problems. [For example], a reader who has automated the schemas associated with letters, words and phrases has working memory capacity available to devote to the meaning of the text, whereas less sophisticated readers may be able to read the text perfectly well but not have sufficient working memory capacity available to extract meaning from it (my substitution).

In short, automation of knowledge stored in long-term memory enables it to be recalled with a minimum of cognitive effort, thereby, like schematisation, releasing much greater amounts of short-term memory capacity for the demands of skilled performance.

Taken together, then, these findings mean that long-term memory of factual information is clearly the key to skilled performance, because of its beneficial effects on short-term memory capacity. And in terms of language teaching peda-

gogy, this means that long-term memorisation of language knowledge is crucial for the development of real-world communicative ability, since it can significantly free up the short-term memory resources necessary for the task.

4 Facilitating long-term memory of language knowledge

It follows logically from these characteristics of ‘cognitive architecture’ that, as Kirschner et al. (2006: 77) put it, “The aim of all instruction is to alter long-term memory.” And, as indicated earlier, the consequent main overall question for pedagogy thus becomes: what form of teaching is most likely to facilitate long-term memorisation of language knowledge?

By way of answer, the same literature which has been discussed in the previous section is unequivocal:

[...] evidence from controlled studies [...] almost uniformly supports direct, strong instructional guidance rather than constructivist-based minimal guidance during the instruction of novice to intermediate learners. Even for students with considerable prior knowledge, strong guidance while learning is most often found to be equally effective as unguided approaches. (Kirschner et al. 2006: 83-84).

‘Translated’ in terms of the concepts introduced in section 2 above, “direct, strong instructional guidance” can be seen as representing a form of pedagogy similar to what has been referred to as a ‘learning to communicate’ approach, and “constructivist-based minimal guidance” can be regarded as a pedagogical concept largely congruent with what has been called a ‘communicating to learn’ approach. Thus, the research evidence referred to by Kirschner et al. (2006) actually appears to point in the opposite direction from that assumed by most of the applied linguistics literature discussed earlier, i.e., in favour of the typical GEFL coursebook approach to language knowledge teaching pedagogy, and against the type widely favoured by the applied linguistics discourse.

A further major body of work which also contradicts the anti-GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching stance is described in Hattie (2009) (cf. Peal 2014: 182-184). Hattie’s study is based on the findings of more than 800 meta-analyses of research articles involving 138 educational ‘interventions’. For each of these ‘influences’ he calculated an ‘effect size’, based on the average improvement in student performance results reported in the studies, divided by the standard deviation. The overall average figure derived from these calculations was 0.4, which Hattie therefore regarded as the ‘hinge point’ (i.e., dividing line) for categorising the studies’ findings. Consequently, interventions/influences

with an effect size greater than the hinge point (i.e., > 0.4) were classified as ‘effective’, and those with an effect size of 0.6 or greater as ‘highly effective’. By this means, so-called ‘direct instruction’ - as already indicated, a form of pedagogy similar to a ‘learning to communicate’ approach - was shown to have an effect size of 0.59 (i.e., just short of ‘highly effective’), whereas the effect size of ‘problem-based learning’ - a pedagogical concept allied to a ‘communicating to learn’ approach - was only 0.15 (Hattie 2009: 243).

A number of other major studies report similar results. Thus, as Peal (2014: 185-187) describes, in ‘Project Follow Through’, a large-scale, longitudinal investigation conducted across a range of educational subject areas in the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s, the competing claims of ‘direct instruction’ versus a variety of other, mainly ‘progressivist’ teaching methods - in other words, ones of a similar theoretical bent to ‘communicating to learn’ (see Samuda & Bygate 2008: Ch. 2) - were investigated. As Peal (2014: 186) explains:

Direct Instruction achieved first place in virtually every measured outcome. In terms of academic skills, Direct Instruction was the only method that did significantly better than its control groups, far outstripping all other methods.

Other, more recent large-scale studies also confirm this picture, such as Coe et al. (2014), as well as a range of sources discussed in Christodoulou (2014).

At this point, thus, the burning question must be one of ‘why?’: why is it, in other words, that ‘direct instruction’ forms of pedagogy, such as ‘learning to communicate’, produce superior results? By way of an answer, as Kirschner et al (2006: 77) explain, the use of so-called ‘inquiry-based instruction’ - that is, of an approach similar to ‘communicating to learn’ - is ineffective for the long-term memorisation of knowledge because of the demands it places on short-term memory. As they put it:

Inquiry-based instruction requires the learner to search a problem space for problem-relevant information. All problem-based searching makes heavy demands on working memory. Furthermore, that working memory load does not contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in long-term memory because while working memory is being used to search for problem solutions, it is not available and cannot be used to learn.

Christodoulou (2014: 38) makes a similar point:

We do not find it easy to learn new information when we have no or minimal guidance. This is because of the limitations of working memory [...] When we are presented with lots of new information and very little guidance, it is hard for our working

memories to make sense of all the new information. Because we are so busy finding ways to work with the new information, or searching for ways to make sense of it, we find it hard to commit the new information to memory.

The authors in question therefore argue that a more ‘structured’ approach to the teaching of knowledge is needed instead, such as ‘direct instruction’, one in which there is plenty of direct pedagogical guidance, since only in this way can the necessary resources be made available in short-term memory to facilitate the transfer of knowledge into long-term memory.

As Christodoulou (2014: 40-41) explains, in describing one of her writing lessons:

By using direct instruction and drill, I broke down the knowledge required to be a clear and coherent writer, sequenced it logically and taught each bit in isolation. I then asked students to practise it repeatedly. Whenever they learned a new piece of knowledge, I would ask them to practise that and to practise combining it with what they had learned before. This approach is effective because it means working memory is not overloaded. Pupils are able to learn and practise each piece of knowledge in isolation [...].

In contrast to her earlier attempts to use an “independent learning approach” (i.e., an approach similar to ‘communicating to learn’) for this purpose, she describes her use of direct instruction as much more effective:

I was astonished at how successful ... [the direct instruction lessons] were. Pupils were able to learn concepts which I had previously thought were just too tricky or difficult to bother with... they seemed to quite enjoy the lessons, too. In comparison with the independent learning approach I had used before, it was much more successful... This approach [independent learning]... asked pupils to fulfil an aim without actually teaching them how to do it. (Christodoulou 2014: 40, my interpolations).

Quite obviously, since the direct instruction approach described here shares much of its underlying conceptual foundations with ‘learning to communicate’, the same advantages as Christodoulou attributes to direct instruction can therefore be seen as accruing to a ‘learning to communicate’ approach as well. By the same token, the drawbacks she and Kirschner et al. (2006) attribute to ‘inquiry-based instruction’ can be seen as also applying equally well to a ‘communicating to learn’ approach.

However, it should also be noted that, although a ‘communicating to learn’ approach, for the reasons given, may be relatively ineffective as the main or sole means of facilitating transfer of language knowledge to long-term memory,

there is evidence that it is nevertheless capable of playing a useful ancillary role in the matter, as parts of the applied linguistics literature on the topic have argued. For example, as Swan (2005) points out, forms of this kind of pedagogy, such as ‘task-based instruction’, can reinforce existing knowledge of language, by providing additional and more ‘holistic’ ‘communicative’ practice (cf. Littlewood 2004) and thereby supporting further schematisation and automation of language knowledge already stored in long-term memory.

Such a stance can be seen as also consonant with the overall findings of recent classroom-based research. These are seen by Lightbown & Spada (2006: 179) to:

offer support for the view that form-focused instruction and corrective feedback provided within the context of communicative and content-based programmes are more effective in promoting second language learning than programmes that are limited to a virtually exclusive emphasis on comprehension, fluency, or accuracy alone.

In other words, research of this nature indicates that a blend of ‘learning to communicate’ and ‘communicating to learn’ pedagogies is more effective than a methodological diet consisting solely of one or the other. As a corollary, Lightbown and Spada (2006: 180) also go on to say:

[...] it is not necessary to choose between form-based and meaning-based instruction. Rather, the challenge is to find the best balance of these two orientations.

And here, in fact, despite the charge in much of the applied linguistics literature that GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching pedagogy ignores its research findings, as mentioned earlier, many such coursebooks are actually very much in tune with the views of the parts of the literature just discussed. This is the case because it is nowadays typical for GEFL coursebooks, in addition to a main focus on the ‘learning’ side of ‘learning to communicate’, to also include a related ‘task’ element, in which language knowledge studied earlier in a unit of work is put into practice in a life-like way, thus catering more adequately to the ‘communicate’ side of the equation as well (see, e.g., Hutchinson 2009; Crace & Wileman 2002; Puchta & Stranks 2004).

However, it is also important to note that coursebook pedagogy has imposed its own logic on the matter, i.e., its incorporation of communication tasks typically takes a ‘task-supported’ (Ellis 2003: Ch. 8) rather than a ‘task-based’ form. In other words, the primary focus in such a paradigm is still on the ‘learning’ side (i.e., ‘direct instruction’ in language knowledge items), and the task represents an additional, ‘value-added’ element. This is in contrast to the configuration typ-

ical of a ‘communicating to learn’ approach, whereby the task element is primary, and any form-focused work secondary.⁴ An overall ‘learning’ then ‘communicating’ arrangement of this kind echoes Peal (2014: 204), when he says “Learning by doing [i.e., communicating to learn] is an impoverished philosophy: learning then doing is the principle that should guide teachers” (my interpolation).

5 Further evidence

The items from the applied linguistics literature just discussed are, ironically enough, by no means the only ones which can be seen as lending support to the typical GEFL coursebook form of language knowledge learning pedagogy, despite having tended to be overlooked or ignored by those parts of the applied linguistics literature critical of such coursebooks. The remainder of this paper is therefore devoted to discussing some more of these unjustifiably neglected items, and thereby showing that there is a good deal of further unacknowledged support within other parts of the applied linguistics literature itself for the typical GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching approach.

5.1 ‘High’ vs. ‘low structure’ lessons

Firstly, the success of teaching designed along similar lines to a ‘learning to communicate’ approach is documented in detail in Wong-Fillmore (1985) (also see O’Neill 1991), a major longitudinal study of a large number of ESL lessons, aimed at attempting to determine “how classes that worked well for language learning differed from those that worked less well” (Wong-Fillmore 1985: 24). Wong-Fillmore’s data analysis identified two main types of lessons, differentiated in terms of the amount of ‘structure’ they contained. The first kind - what may be referred to as ‘high structure’ lessons - contained many teacher-directed whole-class or large-group activities, whereas the second - what can be described as ‘low structure’ lessons - consisted of “fewer teacher-directed activities than individual and group learning activities in which students work cooperatively without much teacher involvement” (1985: 24).

When the learning outcomes for the two types of lessons were compared, it was found that the high structure lessons were much more successful. It is instructive to consider why this was the case. For example, as Wong-Fillmore explains, one of the major features of the high structure lessons was that they had clear

⁴ All this said, it can be argued that a better term than ‘task-supported learning’ would be ‘task-enhanced learning’ (Tom Hutchinson, personal communication), because of the status the ‘learning’ element versus the ‘communicating’ one (i.e., the ‘task’) in the procedure.

‘boundary markers’, i.e., changes in activities were signalled by the repetitive use of a series of indicators, such as a change in the teacher’s voice quality, her position and bearing, the smooth movement of students on command to different areas of the classroom, and so on. As Wong-Fillmore points out, the effect of such devices was to give “the students an idea of what to expect, both linguistically and instructionally” (1985: 28). Other methods used in the high structure lessons were “regularly scheduled events”, “clear lesson format [...] from day to day – ‘scripts’”, “clear and fair turn allocation procedures for student participation” (ibid: 49-50), and so on. All of these procedures can be seen as helping learners to know what to expect and do from moment to moment as the lessons unfolded.

On the other hand, in the low structure lessons

... it was often unclear when one event ended and another began. The students frequently appeared uncertain as to what was going on or what they were to do next. In contrast to the successful classes in which little time was wasted getting activities organized, lessons took a great deal longer to get underway in the less successful classes, and teachers had to spend a lot more time informing students as to what was expected of them (ibid: 28).

Now, from the perspective of the studies of information storage and retrieval and the related pedagogical issues reviewed earlier, it follows that:

- i. the high structure lessons can be assumed to have helped to free up short-term memory resources for the task of committing information to the long-term memory store, because students will not have had to use those same resources for trying to work out what was happening in the lesson, and the converse, i.e., in the low structure lessons, learners will have had fewer short-term memory resources available for long-term memorisation, since they would be needed instead for working out what they were supposed to be doing;
- ii. the high structure lessons provide further support for a direct instruction, ‘learning to communicate’ pedagogy, since they share a number of features in common, e.g., a formal, explicit approach to teaching, with a clear separation of lesson stages; and, equally, low structure lessons, because their pedagogy resembles the nature of the looser, more informal procedures of an ‘inquiry-based instruction’, ‘communicating to learn’ approach, provide further evidence of its drawbacks.

However, much of the discourse of applied linguistics nevertheless appears to favour a ‘low structure’ lesson orientation, of a kind in keeping with the general principles of a ‘communicating to learn’ approach. For example, as Nunan (1999: 74) puts it:

[g]enerally speaking, classrooms informed by current [...] views on language pedagogy will involve a change in teaching approach away from a high-structure orientation towards a more low-structure orientation [...] while direct instruction and high-structure tasks are not eschewed, much more time will be devoted to low-structure tasks.

No empirical evidence is put forward to support this view, however. The reason why this contradictory state of affairs exists seems to be because the primary rationale for a communicating to learn approach has nearly always been based only on an *a priori* assertion of its potential educational benefits, by reference to, e.g., the ‘constructivist’ learning theories of Kohonen (1992), and so on, rather than empirical evidence, i.e., its advocacy has been for reasons other than clear evidence of its pedagogical effectiveness.

In keeping with this interpretation, Nunan (1999) argues that what he terms “the contemporary in language education”, i.e., a broadly ‘communicating to learn’ view, “was... reinforced by an *ideological* shift in focus away from the teacher and the textbook and toward the learner” (1999: 10, my emphasis), and, later on, he refers to “the *ideology* driving the view of education presented here” (1999: 89-90, my emphasis). The impetus behind the promotion of the ‘communicating to learn’ approach has therefore been primarily ideological, rather than empirical. Concomitantly, it would appear that much of the applied linguistics critique of GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching pedagogy is founded on reasons of this kind, rather than on the basis of solid evidence.

5.2 Classroom dynamics

Other parts of the applied linguistics literature that tend to be overlooked by critics of GEFL coursebooks include those which offer insights into why, in addition to the reasons already adduced, research into direct instruction forms of pedagogy, such as ‘high structure’ lessons, has frequently shown such positive results. Thus, so far it has been pointed out that a ‘learning to communicate’ approach facilitates long-term memorisation of language knowledge because of the way it frees up short-term memory resources for the task. But in addition to these cognitive effects, such an approach has important psycho-social benefits as well.

For example, as Prabhu (1992) (cf. Allwright 1996, Allwright 1998) argues, the language teaching lesson needs to be seen “not just a pedagogic [...] but a social event as well” (Prabhu 1992: 225). As he explains, lessons are complex interpersonal encounters, since:

Behind the conventionalised roles and routines of a lesson are a group of individuals - a teacher and many learners - with varied personalities, motives, self-images, fears and aspirations, levels of tolerance, and degrees of maturity [...] Conducting a lesson is, first and foremost, handling a collection of friendly and unfriendly people in a way that maximally protects or projects, and minimally hurts or diminishes, one’s own self-image as a teacher. The learners in their turn perceive the teacher as being friendly or unfriendly, helpful or hostile, tolerant or vindictive, and so on, both to themselves and to different fellow learners, and try to act in a way that protects or enhances their own varied self-images. (Prabhu 1992: 229).

As a result, as Prabhu also explains, the inherent threat to teacher and learner self-image engendered by this kind of everyday classroom interaction creates a disposition towards routinisation:

The ritualisation may or may not take the form of dress regulations, standing up to show respect, the use of honorifics, first names or last names, not speaking unless asked to, procedures for assignment and submission of work, procedures for punishment and reward, opening and closing moves for the lesson as a whole or for any phase of it, and so on; but there is at least a set of shared notions about the different phases of a lesson, legitimate and deviant behaviour, the extent of teacher’s authority and learner’s right, and duties and obligations on both sides. (Prabhu 1992: 228).

In other words, the nature of the lesson as a social event predisposes its participants to attempt to make the experience more tolerable by the adoption of predictable sets of ‘structures’ of the kind that can be associated with a direct instruction-based form of language teaching, such as a ‘learning to communicate’ approach. From this perspective, therefore, GEFL coursebook pedagogy of this kind can be seen as also providing a means of meeting an important set of social and psychological classroom teaching and learning needs, a factor which also helps to account for the positive research findings discussed earlier.

5.3 Other items

Limitations of space unfortunately preclude detailed discussion of a number of additional parts of the applied linguistics literature also of relevance to the concerns of this section. Briefly, however, these include Littlewood (1992; cf. Littlewood 2004), regarding ‘part-skill’ and ‘whole-task practice’, a conceptual

framework which neatly integrates elements of ‘learning to communicate’ and ‘communicating to learn’ approaches, rather than viewing them in the oppositional terms favoured by much of the applied linguistic coursebook critique; Johnson (1996), in connection with ‘ra + 1’, a method of understanding and designing language knowledge teaching activities by incrementally adjusting the ‘required attention’ (‘ra’) - i.e., memory demands - involved; DeKeyser (2003), in relation to the importance of methodical ‘practice’ in language knowledge learning; VanPatten (2007), on ‘processing instruction’, a method of explicitly focusing on the ‘Occam’s razor’ distinguishing the meaning of one area of language knowledge from another. All these items can also be seen in various ways as congruent with and lending further support to aspects of the thinking behind GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching pedagogy.

6 Conclusion

In the foregoing I have tried to show that, first of all, there is an influential strain of literature within applied linguistics which regards prevailing GEFL coursebook pedagogy as ineffective. This critique is based on the view that, since most GEFL coursebooks appear to make relatively little use of the majority of language teaching concepts stemming from applied linguistics over the last 20 years or so, their theoretical underpinning is unsound, and hence their potential for facilitating language learning is weak. However, as I have argued, such a one-way, top-down stance precludes the possibility that the enduring popularity of the typical GEFL coursebook pedagogical approach may be because, in reality, it actually caters very effectively to a number of fundamental language learning needs. I then went on to explore evidence from both outside and within applied linguistics which supports this view, with particular reference to the language knowledge teaching element of GEFL coursebook pedagogy.

However, it should be emphasised that none of this is to argue, of course, that GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching pedagogy in its present form is in any way the ‘finished article’. For example, as Waters (2009) indicates, coursebook ‘carrier content’, intended to provide a linguistic ‘backdrop’ to language knowledge learning, is often insufficiently engaging. Equally, texts included in the ‘communication’ element of units are frequently of such length that the learning load becomes too great. There is sometimes also an insufficiently close fit between the ‘learning’ and the ‘communication’ unit parts, meaning that the further, holistic practice of language forms studied in earlier stages of work is not adequately provided for. And so on.

Nevertheless, despite these faults, GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching pedagogy, for the reasons advanced in this paper, needs to be regarded in a much more positive light by applied linguistics. By the same token, the overweening promotion by much of applied linguistics of a ‘communicating to learn’ approach as a replacement for ‘learning to communicate’ forms of GEFL coursebook language knowledge teaching pedagogy is also clearly inappropriate. Furthermore, it can also be argued that much the same overall stance also needs to be applied to the study of other areas of GEFL coursebook pedagogy currently regarded as unfashionable from the perspective of the applied linguistics critique, such as the use of non-authentic texts, the inclusion of cultural content from the native-English speaking world, the employment of an English as a native language model, and so on. In other words, rather than pre-judging such features on the basis of an assumed superiority of insight derived from a partial reading of both the applied linguistics and other literatures, *prima facie* consideration should instead be given to the possibility that such areas of pedagogy, as in the case of the language knowledge teaching element, may also possess sound theoretical and empirical bases, ones which merit thorough and unbiased investigation. In this way, to paraphrase Pope⁵, the proper ‘required reading’ for the academic study of GEFL coursebooks might a good deal more frequently be the truly objective analysis of the GEFL coursebook itself.

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⁵ Cf. “The proper study of mankind is man”, Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man: Epistle II*.

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