Learning by Participation :
A Habermasian Approach to Language Teaching

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参加による学習：ハーバーマスのアプローチを言語教育に

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Abstract :

Habermas's theory of Communicative Rationality (CR) can aid teaching and learning in three important ways. First, by emphasising self-reflexivity it shifts responsibility from teacher to learner. Second, CR encourages a more expressive and deliberative mode of learning, where students deliberate and justify their arguments with valid reasons that are not only factual but also socially relevant. Third, through co-operative learning CR treats learners not as mere subjects to be educated but as participants who have as valid claims as those of their education institution, teachers and curriculum authority. Our case study demonstrates that the CR approach makes the learning process a more collaborative, democratic and authentic process in which students and teachers are more equal participants.

要旨：ハーバーマスのコミュニケーション合理性(CR)に関する理論は、3つの重要な方法で教えること、学ぶことを支援できます。最初に、自己反射性の協調によって、教師から学習者に責任を転換します。次にCRは、もっと表現し、より熟考する学習形態を促進します。ここでは、学生は、自分たちの議論を、事実だけではなく社会的に適切な、妥当な理由とともに熟考し、正当化します。第3に、CRは、協同の学習を通じて、学習者を単なる教育される対象ではなく、教育機関、教師および教育課程当局に対して、有効な主張を持つ者として学習者を扱います。私たちの事例研究は、CRアプローチが、学生と教師がより対等な参加者として、協力的、民主的な真の学習方法にすることを実証します。

Key words : language teaching, participatory learning, co-operation, reasoning, responsibility, communicative rationality, Habermas

INTRODUCTION

Habermas, a German social theorist, is a well-known figure for his theory of democratic participation in the political process. He divides rationality into two : Instrumental Rationality (IR) and Communicative Rationality (CR). The former is used strategically to advance one's personal and political interests ; therefore it is a selfish rationality. The latter, however, is used to reach out for an understanding between people for the sake of co-operation and consensus ; therefore, it is reciprocal

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and altruistic. This paper will argue that CR－free and fair communication－is as relevant in the classroom as it is in politics, because the target of this theory is equal participation for all, and the language classroom, too, is an arena where there is a demand for such a goal.

CR provides a pragmatic framework within which one can critique as well as participate in order to promote social justice and understanding. Habermas does not give a blueprint for the way society should be, for he leaves that to the real participants to decide and act upon. In other words his theory does not presuppose the outcome of any rational deliberation. It holds back from offering a solution to each and every problem. In other words his concern is not what decisions we make but how we should make sure everyone is involved in the decision-making process.

This seems to be in contradiction with the education system, where the outcomes are considered and planned before the means of achieving those outcomes are in place. Institutions of higher education in particular employ specific methods in order to educate learner for specific careers. Once learners are inside a programme they have little say in what and how they should learn. In order to achieve those career goals education institutions employ Instrumental Rationality (IR) methods－strategic rationality that helps individuals to get ahead of others without much consideration to the social good －to teach and evaluate for the sake of efficiency and standard. It is a top down approach, in which learners' competency and behaviour are vigorously analysed using empirical and scientific methods. Learners are considered subjects rather than participants ; and therefore, they have little or no say in curriculum content, goal and methods of teaching. The emphasis is "on control, conformity, and standardised curriculum packages" (Ewert, 1991 citing Baldwin, 1987). In such a *positivist* environment the assumption is that there is little chance for CR to flourish, because the effectiveness and efficiency of a value-laden participatory and democratic approach－*normative* in essence－cannot be easily categorised and empirically assessed through IR-induced quantitative evaluations.

It is a common presumption among some who are involved in education that since normative values are hard to quantify, it is best to ignore them in favour a more quantifiable approach in educational research ; therefore branding IR as the only universally valid method of knowledge (Ewert, 1991). IR is not value-free as a method either. Quantitative research often treats human subjects as static and quantifiable instead of dynamic and autonomous. CR on the other hand considers change as an inherent aspect of society as well as individual ; therefore, the focus is more on how interactions between individuals can be made fairer, in which everyone involved is given an equal voice.

CR in education should not be equated with the rejection of IR altogether. Instead CR, too, could be an effective and efficient method in teaching and learning, because it has the power to humanise the process of learning, where learners are no longer considered mere subjects to be educated (and to some extent excluded from the process) but considered as active participants. A CR method assists teaching and learning in three keys areas : it encourages learners to be (1)responsible through self-reflection, (2)reasonable through rational deliberation, and (3)reciprocal through co-operation with others.

RESPONSIBILITY

In language learning CR shifts the emphasis from a language acquisition approach to a language participation approach. The former considers leaners as individuals motivated by one thing only : to

acquire a language. The acquisition process, and to some extent what the acquired language may do to those individual learners, are considered far less important compared to how learners perform in exams. By demeaning the process of learning as mere stage, learners are often treated as just an audience. Their participation and active involvement are only encouraged after the procedures are designed and the outcomes are set. In this way learners are treated as secondary agencies to those of teachers and curriculum designers. The focus of the curriculum tends not to be learners' participation, but learners' skills and competence to compete in exams. Knowledge becomes a commodity and assessment an auction and learners competitors (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Test and exams are often seen as ends in themselves rather than means. This study-for-exam approach alienates learners from knowledge as a human need.

The participation approach, however, emphasises on the process of learning itself, stating that the process is as important as the outcome. The goal of language teaching cannot be summed up by a simple acquisition of another language, but rather traversing a route to participate in another culture (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). In other words learning is a struggle for participation. In language teaching classroom procedures are as important as the outcomes of learning. By considering the process of learning as a lesser important aspect of teaching, one treats learners as less than equal participants. By considering learners as participants one elevates their status from those of passive subjects to those of autonomous individuals who are responsible for and capable of self-reflecting on their place within the community of learners. Learning a second language is a "process of becoming a member of a certain community" (Sfard, 1998, p.6). Language acquisition and language participation can effectively coexist. While the former focuses on imposed standards, the latter gives more emphasis on participants' autonomy ; therefore, they play a complementary role for each other.

While acquisition paradigm focuses on individual's possession of a second language as a commodity, something to be utilised for learner's personal gain, and to get ahead in society, under the participation paradigm the learning process is part of community building and gaining a sense of belonging. Learners strive to become part of a narrative. Self is constituted as a story, in the process. As individuals we have our own personal narratives and according to MacIntyre (1998) we are also part a community narrative, whether we want it or not. At any given time we are part of several community narratives, and self is in a struggle to participate and to be heard ; therefore, there is a demand for a rigorous and responsible participation. Autonomous learning does not mean that individuals take a strategic approach that puts them against the rest of the community, as libertarians advocate, but more in a responsible, emancipatory manner, where individuals do not see themselves as separate from the rest of the community of learners but become more self-assertive participants. Utilising CR is necessary to have an active role in the community. The better we reason the more demand there is for justification for our actions ; therefore, we learn to be responsible for what we do and how our actions affect the rest of the community.

Reflexive participation, in which learners and teachers constantly evaluate themselves as participants, is the key to a meaningful autonomous learning process in which learners are given more room to reflect on their own responsibilities, towards those around them, as well as his or her own learning (Young, 1990). This approach shifts the focus from teachers evaluating learners to learners evaluating themselves and their peers. Although this is not a substitute for standardized tests and

formal exams, it does provide a counter-balance to quantitative assessments. The validity of their improvements not only comes from the teacher or a higher authority but also from themselves and fellow learners. The current mind-set makes it hard to see fellow learners as fair judges, but by the same token one can question the validity of top-down evaluation system as the only valid mode of assessment. Giving learners the opportunity to assess their progress and their fellow learners' progress, however, makes the process of learning fairer and more inclusive.

REASONING

Deliberation competence is seen as a valued possession of skilled lawyers and debaters. In order to participate well in a discussion, great verbal articulation and speech eloquence are generally considered pre-requisites. CR, however, liberates learners from such constraints by stating that authenticity and sincerity are of greater importance than competency when it comes to participation. It shifts the focus from linguistic competence to that of practical and performative characteristics of speech acts (Terry, 1997), and how learners make themselves intelligible. Correcting learners' mistakes on the spot, often seen as an effective and important teaching technique, may actually hinder learners' abilities to participate effectively within a discourse. In other words every time the teacher corrects a learner, when the learner in question is trying to make a point, the teacher supresses the learner by pointing towards a more restrictive aspect of language communication, that is the syntactical part, which forces certain limits on active participation and free discourse. Teaching grammar is not redundant, but it should be taught when it quenches learners' communication needs and relates to their experience (Savignon, 2002).

CR also places greater importance on the pragmatics－in doing so it moves away from Chomsky's generative grammar (we are machines born with the capability of generating as well as mimicking syntactical rules). Placing too much importance on syntax and generative semantics dehumanises language as a fixed and solid entity－almost automatic ; while in reality language is also a malleably dynamic tool ; therefore, it should be treated as flexible and practical to be utilised by all in equal measure. Pragmatics, on the other hand, shows humanity－full of innuendoes and feelings－where change is considered to be at the heart of discourse, as Austin (1975) argues that illocutionary interaction is action-bound. Even the simplest linguistic interaction is burdened by power-relation－teacher-student interactions are no exception－and ; therefore, the more democratic the process of learning, the fairer the outcome for all participants. Change and progression are integral part of communication ; therefore, a well-reasoned deliberation by all participants is pre-requisite for a non-coerced consensus. An orthodox education mentality rests on a convention that fact and value should be divided. Ewert (1991) asserts that such division does little to change the reality in classroom, because value-laden socio-linguistic change happens all the time. As a result learners should be allowed to influence the process of learning as much as the teacher or other education bodies.

There is a misconception that young learners are incapable of participating effectively and rationally－this is due to the fact that rationality is commonly equated with IR, i.e. strategic reasoning, not in its communicative aspect－therefore it is suggested that they have to be guided in their acquiring this ability through a problem-solving approach where learners are seen as questioners and teachers as answerers. Young (1990) questions this old notion that young learners are not on par with adults when it comes to reasoning or stating their views. According to him in a coercion-free

environment children are as capable of "formal equivalent reasoning like that of adults" (p.119). This suggests that excluding children based on the idea that they lack rational capacity is a false one. Perhaps the only thing that children may lack is a strategic reasoning ability, which is more experience-induced and less relies on authenticity and sincerity. Similar to the assumption about younger leaner's incapacity for reasoning, some believe that learners from certain cultural backgrounds too lack the ability to reason in the same way learners from Europe or North America do. This line of reasoning posits that certain societies value harmony instead of conflict ; therefore, members of those communities tend not to acquire a robust reasoning ability as opposed to those individuals brought up in a more vigorously dialectical discursive society. Li, Sato and Merwin (1996) conducted a cross-cultural study on the reasoning abilities of adolescent in three countries, Japan, USA and China and confirmed that they had similar reasoning abilities despite their cultural variance. This shows that neither age nor culture can be seen as constraints to deliberative participation.

The constraint of expressing one's view in a second language seems enormous ; however, there are numerous examples of people stating that they in fact feel certain liberation expressing themselves in the second language. The norms and values of one's native language can be as restrictive as the lack of knowledge of the rules of the second language. Samuel Becket, the famous Irish novelist and playwright, chose to write some of his works in French, a second language to him. In one of his letters he explains his decision. "[More]and more my language[English]appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things . . . lying behind it" (Beckett, 1929–1940, online). Creating an ideal environment may be as important as the skill of deliberating in a second language. For some a second language offers another identity. Mori (1997 cited in Pavlenko & Lantolf, 1998, p.173) explains why she tries to avoid speaking her native tongue. "Every word I say forces me to be elaborately polite, indirect, submissive and unassertive. . . . But if I did not speak a 'proper' feminine language I would sound stupid in another way－like someone who is uneducated, insensitive, and rude, and therefore cannot be taken seriously." According to Mia Yun, a Korean writer, writing in her second language is like 'putting on a new dress" (cited in Savignon, 2002, p.14) as it gives her a new freedom to express herself. These examples show that the second language should not be seen as hindrance to genuine participation.

RECIPROCITY

The IR-based acquisition approach often pits learners against one another, where each is given a lane to run in, resembling a sprint game, where learners are constantly assessed through tests, exams and quizzes. Standard assessment often penalises those who cross the lane to cooperate, because ultimately each learner is competing against the rest ; therefore, there is little incentive for cooperation. This approach often alienates learners because they are treated as individual subjects, only connected by the standardised tests that allocate their place in the hierarchy of knowledge acquisition. Under the traditional institutionalised education system there is little room for a group of learners to frame novel ways of interpreting realities around them, of communicating with others, and of perceiving their places and identities within a community (Terry, 1997).

Human knowledge is accumulated not by a handful of individuals but in communities and groups. In order to make the process of learning democratic it is vital to make it more reciprocal and less competitive. Co-operative learning not only assists the traditional problem-solving approach, it also

enhances learners' abilities and enthusiasms for learning because they take ownership of their learning ; therefore, they want to learn (Young, 1990). In order to make the learning process fair, authentic and participatory, there is demand for a coercion-free and dynamic consensus building environment, because education at its core is political as it affects the life opportunities and identities of those participating in the process (Ewert, 1991). CR aims, not for an individual, but rather for a group enlightenment and emancipation through co-ordinated action of everyone involved.

Communication is inherently a group endeavour, involving participants negotiating as well as sharing meaning and conventions (Breen & Candlin, 2002). Learners' selves and the learning process are intertwined. This means that the process of learning is a profound social interaction, as it affects learners' perception of the world, and as a result their identity and notion of their place in that world. The more cooperatively the process of learning is conducted the better the outcome is for the participants involved. As Breen and Candlin (2002) argue, "[within] a [CR] methodology, the role of learner as negotiator-between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning-emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertake" (p.100). Traditionally teachers and exam boards are the only ones given the power to evaluate learners' progress. But given that CR emphasises the normative aspect of learning－how fair and inclusive the process itself ought to be－it is difficult to evaluate it using quantitative methods under the IR approach. The un-testability of the effectiveness of a CR-based approach can be seen as a hindrance to its employment in education. However as I argued earlier that the teacher or the education authority should not be the only ones to evaluate the outcome summatively ; instead group members should also be involved to evaluate the process as well as themselves formatively (Breen and Candlin 2002). In other words it is not only the teacher who provides a finalised assessment, but the participants, too, should be allowed to analyse the content and the process of learning, and the influences such content and process may have on themselves, as individuals as well as a group, as an on-going mode of assessment.

CASE-STUDY

Using CR as a guiding principle we will examine an English newsletter project that was completed by first year university students in a private university in Japan in 2010. I have chosen it because it was an open writing project－students were free to complete the project from start to finish with minimum interference by their teacher. Students in groups of four wrote and published an actual four-page newsletter in English. Each student wrote at least one original article on the topic of his or her choice. Topics included news, reviews (of a book, film, music album and so on), travel, poetry, short story etc. The project emphasised on originality, creativity, and teamwork. It gave students the freedom to be creative, because the theme, target audience, design, and content of the newsletters as well as how they worked together during production were entirely up to them to negotiate among themselves and reach a well-reasoned consensus.

This was a four-week project. In Week 1 I presented the concept in the most general terms possible to allow students to define and refine the process as they went along－and in the way *they* deemed fit. Students worked in groups to choose a theme for their newsletter and a target audience. They also selected the topics they were interested in by negotiating among themselves as to avoid repetition of the same articles and topics. Then they brainstormed and took notes on their topics of

choice. In Week 2 students brought in the first draft of the articles they had written as their homework, and checked them in groups. I supervised and helped them when necessary. The focus of their feedback was on the content of the articles rather than language. In Week 3 they checked the second draft of the articles and this time they gave feedback on the content as well as the language. In this lesson they also chose their newsletter's title and prepared for production. In Week 4 − the final week − they put the articles together using Microsoft Publisher and made last minutes changes to the newsletter. Once they had printed out their final newsletters they displayed them for other groups to see and make comments. At the end students reflected on the project and shared their experience in groups. This reflection time provided students with an opportunity to evaluate themselves as well as their peers.

As we discussed earlier CR helps learning in three important ways. First, it makes learners more responsible for their learning by giving them more autonomy in the process of learning. Second, it allows learners to reason and deliberate on the process as well as the content of their learning. Third, it encourages learners to co-operate in order to make the learning process more reciprocal. The Newsletter Project succeeded in implementing CR as it gave students the freedom to produce their authentic material, i.e. a published newsletter. In the process of writing and publishing students negotiated and agreed on the content of the newsletter as well as the design and the target audience. This guaranteed that all group members worked as a unit and with a single purpose − to produce an original newsletter. Also at the end, through self-reflection, students evaluated the project in groups, and also examined their roles and the role of the teacher. I did not use the project to judge them ; instead they used the project to assess themselves. They were surprised − and to some extent confused − when I said that I would not use this project to assess their performance. But it also gave them the freedom − as a result the responsibility − to assess themselves and their peers. Despite the fact that the project was not formally assessed and did not count towards their final grades, students took it very seriously, because it was solely theirs − they were not trying to get a better grade, instead they were motivated to produce a solid newsletter for their target audience, who turned out to be their fellow classmates.

Although the project motivated students to work together as a team and negotiate their roles within the team, it had a few drawbacks too. In some groups one or two students assumed the role of leaders, which allowed them to make some of the key decisions alone. However this does not mean that it will be the case in the second attempt or third attempt. CR attempts to make the process of learning more democratic and the important thing is to aim towards the ideal situation rather than aiming to reach this situation in the first attempt. Another problem was the varying level of English among group members, which forced some students to take more responsibilities than the rest. Again, it is a logistical problem that does make the process less deliberative. Despite the varying degree of involvement I was satisfied that all students took ownership of the project and made the learning process theirs.

CONCLUSION

Participatory learning leads to participatory citizenship. I have argued that participatory approach to education does not replace the traditional acquisition approach, but complements it. It gives educators a wider scope and allows learners to be active participants in acquiring, owning and contrib-

uting to a second language. CR does not provide a ready-made solution to each and every problem, it merely offers a framework within which each community－a classroom is a community－to discuss in order to resolve their problems and reach a consensus. Employing the participatory approach, based on CR, in classroom goes beyond the traditional student-centred versus teacher-centred dichotomy.

For some the student-centred approach may simply mean learners producing what teacher determines. But under the participatory approach the teacher no longer confines the outcome of what learners produce as well as the process for that matter. Instead the classroom community as a whole agrees on what the outcome of their learning ought to be. Giving learners the opportunity to negotiate their roles, deliberate on the content and the process of learning, and cooperate with others in the classroom may have greater impact on their lives as active and responsible global citizens. It may be difficult to fully employ CR in classrooms in the same way IR is employed, but if teacher is aware of its complementary value, and incorporates it into their teaching when possible, it widens their scope and brings about a gradual change, and makes the process more meaningful for learners as well as teachers. Further research on the use of CR in second language classroom is necessary to understand to what extent it influences learners' motivation.

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