Multicompetence and Second Language Teaching

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The idea of multicompetence as *the compound state of a mind with two grammars* has many implications for syllabus designers and teachers as envisioned by Vivian Cook (2002). Cook sees L2 users as fundamentally different than monolingual L1 users, and suggests that language teachers should recognize and celebrate this distinction. Too often, he suggests, teachers and SLA researchers regard L2 users as deficient, not merely different, when compared to native speakers. Since L2 users can never become native speakers, comparing them to native speakers sets a standard that is unattainable, and even undesirable. Multicompetent people can do things that no monolingual person can, and knowledge of an L2 not only affects their knowledge of the L1, but also enhances other perceptions and abilities as well. This paper will review some of the pedagogical implications of multicompetence as described by Cook (1999, 2002).

Goals of L2 Learning

Cook divides learner goals into two broad categories: external goals, which relate to how the learner would like to use the language outside the classroom, and internal goals, which relate to the learner's mental development as an individual. External goals should be oriented towards the learner, and not native speakers. The communicative needs of second language learners may not be the same as those of native speakers, so the goals of a language course should reflect the specific needs of the L2 learner. This is generally in keeping with current models of curriculum and syllabus design, which almost universally advocate needs analyses.

Internal goals, according to Cook, are often neglected in modern communicative classrooms. Examples of these goals could be the teaching of cultural, racial, and ethnic sensitivity, or emphasizing the benefits of multicompetence. These goals may not be language related, though Cook lists one possible internal goal as the learning of the structure of a language (Cook, 2002).

An interesting paradox that may be inherent is that the external goals are determined by the learner, according to his or her needs. Internal goals, however, are much less customized. A look at the examples provided in Cook's writing suggests that these goals can and should be set by the teacher, with little student input.

Teaching Materials

Cook (1999) also advocates more L2 user representation in the textbooks and materials teachers use in class. Just as there may be gender or ethnic bias in textbooks in general, there is a bias towards native speakers in ESL and EFL textbooks. As Cook explains, "the status of L2 users is in even more need of redress, because they are virtually never represented positively" (p. 200). Many times, the L2 user is represented as ignorant or incompetent. Appearances of successful L2 users would be helpful as they provide positive models and could contribute to the motivation and confidence of the students.

Teachers

Another model that could be provided to the L2 learner is a non-native speaker teacher. Cook (2002) points out that students are more likely to identify with and to be able to emulate non-native speaker teachers than native speakers. Also, these teachers would be able to share their own experiences of learning the language, and may be more sensitive to the difficulties faced by the students.

Use of L1 in the Classroom

Cook (2001) states that over the last century, the use of the first language has been largely taboo in second language teaching. In the strongest form, L1 use is banned, and in the weakest sense, it is minimized. However, he advocates a more positive view: maximizing L2 use. Since multicompetence means that the L1 is always present in the users' minds, it would be artificial and sometimes inefficient to avoid its use. Languages are not compartmentalized within the mind, so there is little reason they should be in the classroom.

Some reasons for using the L1 in the classroom are to convey and check the comprehension of lexical or grammatical forms and meanings, to give directions, and to manage the class. These things may be difficult or impossible to do without resorting to the L1, and it saves time that might be squandered trying to conform to a strict rule of L1 prohibition.

Discussion

Vivian Cook's intention is to declare and assert the rights of the L2 user in second language teaching and learning. In this respect, he shares much in common with Bley-Vroman's (1983) warnings against falling into the *comparative fallacy*. In some ways, what he advocates is not new, and does not necessarily conflict with current trends in teaching and syllabus design.

For example, the external goals he sets agree with most notions of needs analysis in the literature. The internal goals are sometimes a byproduct of these external goals, and some, like the sharing or teaching of culture, seem to be already part of many textbooks. One interesting note is that Cook (1999) uses Skehan's (1998) goals of fluency, accuracy, and complexity as a model of appropriate internal goals because they do not allude explicitly to native speaker norms. However, it would seem that accuracy, at least, must be defined in part on these norms. Otherwise, it would be difficult to arrive at a standard for it according to successful L2 users, as these users themselves may vary greatly in their accuracy.

This leads to another potential problem, as L2 users may be very successful without scoring very highly on Skehan's (1998) criteria. For example, Long (2000) among others has recognized that one of the dangers of communicative teaching is that it may lead to facilitate the natural inclination for learners to focus on meaning over form in language processing and production. This, in turn, could lead to the stabilization or even fossilization of certain aspects of interlanguage that may be averted with a focus on form. While Cook does not address this problem explicitly, some of his examples of internal goals, like the manipulation of language, do provide for a focus on form.

Taken to the extreme, advanced learners and users of the L2 may not be much different from a native speaker in language use. However, it is important that these advanced L2 user

models be provided to students because they are multicompetent, like the students, and unlike monolingual native speakers. Similarly, non-native speaker teachers and teaching materials that include successful L2 users may boost morale by providing attainable goals. Inclusion of the L1 in classrooms also helps legitimatize the L2 learner's multicompetent mind rather than artificially compartmentalizing the two or more languages. Affective considerations have largely been ignored in SLA research, but are undoubtedly important. It is hoped that Cook's recommendations, "can convince students that they are successful multicompetent speakers, not failed native speakers" (Cook, 1999, p. 204).

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