EXPERIENCING POWERFUL ENGLISH THROUGH CACALLA

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English is not a native language in our country, yet there is great desire to learn it. The language has continued to perplex us as to the ways by which we can achieve competence in it. There has been much research directed towards the "best" practices in teaching and learning English. Sadly, the research has not yielded convincing results.

The ambition that most Filipinos have is not really to be native speakers of English but to learn it because it is a language of wider communication (LWC) not only here in the Philippines, but globally as well. In addition, much of what there is to learn about almost anything academic is written in English. To access that kind of knowledge, therefore, one has to learn English, not to mention the non-utilitarian or non-instrumental aims in learning English; for example, one may want to learn a language in order to communicate effectively with native speakers of that language, i.e., an integrative aim. Many Filipinos, particularly those aiming to go and live abroad, say, in the United States, may have such an integrative reason, albeit this may not sound patriotic in some sense.

A new framework (CACALLA) of teaching a language is being proposed. Details of that framework will be presented. A recent achievement in the Philippines with respect to evolving this model is its application in textbook writing. A new series whose publication is forthcoming adopts the CACALLA framework. The paper will describe the framework as adopted in said textbook series.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is not a native language in our country, yet there is great desire to learn it. The language has continued to perplex us as to the ways by which we can achieve competence in it. There has been a considerable amount of research directed toward the "best" practices in teaching and learning it. Sadly, the research has not yielded convincing results.

Perhaps the desire to learn English is due to the fact that it is the world's LWC (Language of Wider Communication), in the parlance of sociolinguistics. In addition, much of what there is to learn about almost anything is written in English. To access that kind of knowledge, therefore, one has to learn English, not to mention its other utilitarian values, like it being a passport to landing a better job or its integrative value to some people, like desiring to integrate or identify, not only with native speakers of English, bur with the young professionals of the country and to business executives (cf. Santos, 1969) whose command of

the language is to be admired. To the former reason, it can be added that, many Filipinos desire to live abroad, particularly, in the United States where English is the native and mainstream language. Furthermore, English is the language of local and international conferences, workshops and the like. Filipinos have figured well in such conferences because of some degree of knowledge, and skill in communicating, in English. If it is an attitude worth noting, Filipinos, in general, are participative, and the vehicle through which this is made possible is English. It is, therefore, not surprising to say that the language which is the most in demand among Filipinos is English.

Only the ultra-nationalist will perhaps have an alternative view which understandably favors Filipino, which by 1987 has been recognized as a language really representing most, if not all, of the indigenous languages of the Philippines. Filipino is also the acknowledged lingua franca from as far north to the southernmost tip of the country. As proclaimed by one of the country's respected linguists, Sibayan (1994), it may take about one hundred years for Filipino to be intellectualized. He cites the Norwegian experience to bring to bear on what has actually happened along the lines of language standardization. .

Much criticism has been verbalized on the issue of English. There is the group of the so-called ultra-nationalists who do not at all approve of what to them may appear to be a neglect of Filipino by the apparent highlighting of English. Said highlighting of English could simply be a way by which the "pragmatic" Filipino could be helped to learn a language which he sees as being more beneficial at the moment so that he can have greater upward social mobility. Sibayan and Gonzalez (1990) have this to say in support of this statement:

> As long as the path of social mobility is open because of English, one suspects that the single biggest attitudinal and motivating force favoring English over Filipino will continue to be the economic imperative, with nationalism and the imperative of cultural emancipation taking at best a second place. In plain terms, pragmatist that he is, when confronted with a choice between economic survival and being a nationalist, the Filipino refuses to accept the dichotomy and states that his nationalism should not be measured by his competence in the indigenous language (Filipino) nor should his nationalism be identified with his choice (preference) of instruction in school (English).[1]

It is likewise implied above that language should not be equated with nationalism. In fact, being an effective bilingual may augur towards a different sense of nationalism. Imagine a Filipino who is an adequate, if not a perfect bilingual who could be his country's pride because with what he knows of two languages, he stands a much better chance of contributing not only to his country's, but also to the world's socioeconomic development.

A new framework has been designed, albeit it is not entirely original with the author, its proponent. As coined, CACALLA, the acronym stands for a combination of two well-known language teaching models, the Communicative Approach (*CA*) and the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (*CALLA*). Regarding the former, the author adopts the CA that is proposed by Canale and Swain (1981). This CA holds that to be communicatively competent, one must possess four kinds of competencies competencies: linguistic competence, which is referred to as the ability, or at most, mastery of the code (i.e. the grammar aspect) of a language; discourse competence, the ability to produce and understand coherent and cohesive forms or expressions in/of a language; sociolinguistic, the
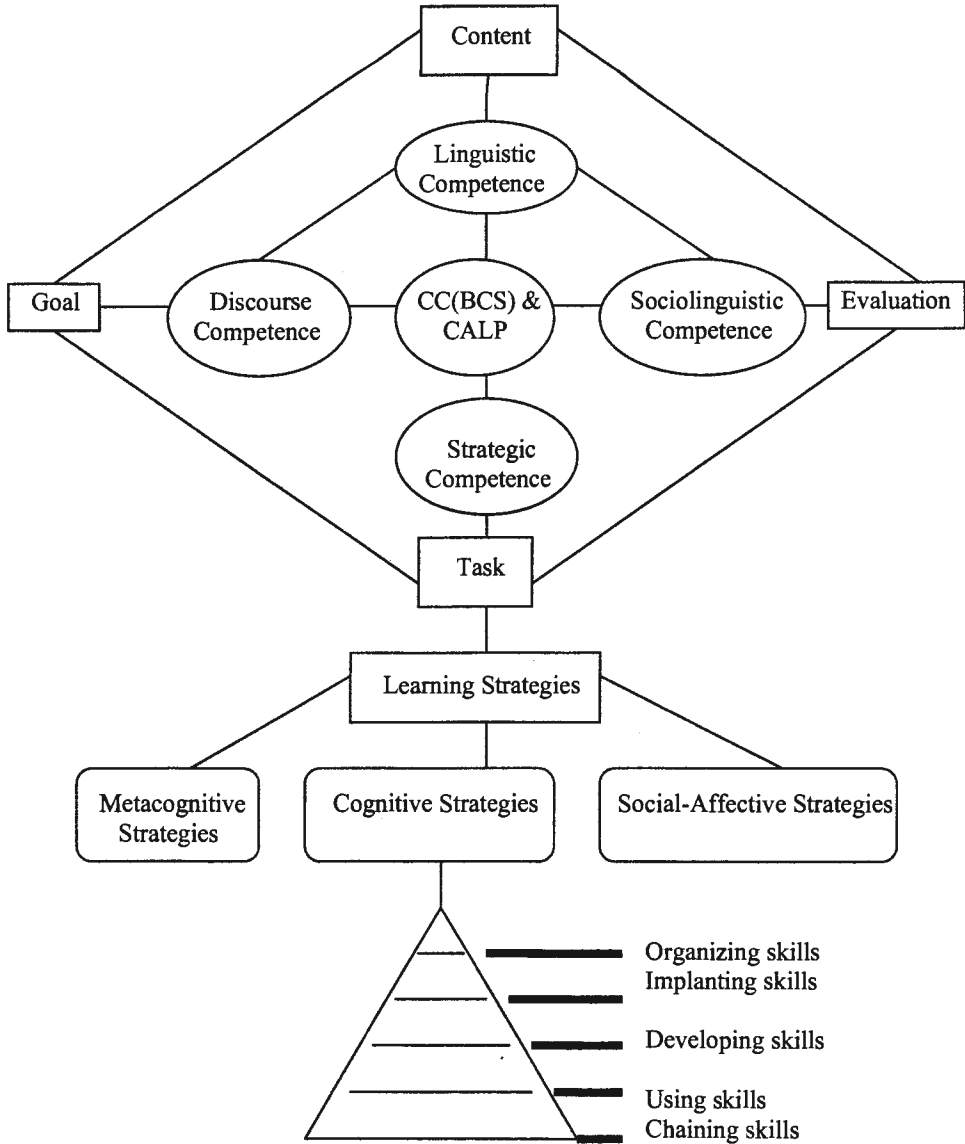
ability to communicate with ease and effect in specified sociolinguistic situations or settings; and strategic, the ability to compensate for breakdowns in communication and/or the ability to enhance/elaborate one's responses or the ability to understand somebody's elaborate/enhanced responses and thus be enabled to communicate more effectively.

A slight departure from the first version of the model is the parallelism drawn between Canale and Swain's CC (communicative competence) and Cummins' notions of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills). Furthermore, CACALLA believes that, contrary to previous claims (cf. Chamot and O'Malley, 1989) which were actually based on the findings of previous research, a language learner may not have to wait for seven years before s/he can aspire to develop his cognitive academic language learning ability. A language teacher, for that matter, will not have to wait till his/her students have well-developed conversational skills in a language before s/he can conduct exercises which will develop their cognitive academic learning abilities in that language. CALLA learning strategies that have an academic orientation could already be used alongside the development of BICS or CC. In other words, in using CALLA strategies, it can be hoped that both communicative competence (BICS) and cognitive academic language learning ability (CALLA) can be developed. It remains to be seen, however, the extent to which each of these skills gets developed, as well as the sequence (as to which one first) gets developed. Another point that slightly differs from Nunan's view is CACALLA's belief that not only should there be a tandem between *Content* and *Task*, but that simultaneously, as one designs a syllabus, one must have the core of that syllabus in mind running through the conception of the four components of a syllabus: goals, contents, tasks, and the evaluation of a syllabus. In brief, it is important to bear in mind just what the specific curriculum core is targeted; once ensured, identification of the goals, contents, tasks, and evaluation components should dovetail naturally.

The last, but not the least, component of the CACALLA model is a five-phased exercise typology. Phase one, the stage where only organizing skills exercises or tasks should be used as learners are not yet that good in the language being learned. Organizing skills exercises are supposed to be the easiest and most mechanical ones. Phase two is the stage at which exercises are of the implanting skills type where the language form(s) to be taught are derived from genuine communicative situations which are simulated. The third phase, the developing skills phase, allows the language learner to be able to produce as much language as possible bur still within simulated situations and where the teacher still exercises some degree of control over the language learning activity. Phase four is the stage where learners are encouraged to use extensively the language (forms) that they are learning. Phase five called Chains, is the eclectic phase, where learners are encouraged to combine exercise types/situations in communicating via the language. This is the phase where language use is the most reflective of real-life situations. Combinations of any two or any three or all four exercise types occur.

In summary and as earlier described in Castillo (1999), CACALLA is a contrivance of four models put into one: Nunan's (1989) curriculum syllabus design model, Canale and Swain's communicative competence (1981) model, Chamot and O'Malley's Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) model, and Grewer, et al.'s exercise typology as translated by Candlin (1981). (See the amended diagram of the amended CACALLA model below, which, as stated above, differs slightly from the first version of the model in that the CC (communicative competence) is now equated with BICS (Basic

Interpersonal Communication Skills)). CACALLA believes that the development of communicative competence or BICS should be the rightful core of a language curriculum.

2. CACALLA AS A FRAMEWORK IN TEXTBOOK WRITING

In her task of coordinating a textbook series, the author has applied CACALLA as guiding framework. The question mentioned in the preface of the series, aptly raises the main point of CACALLA, thus:

How is it to learn English almost effortlessly, or to catch English and learn it in the process?

The answer to this question is that CACALLA is that language teaching model which makes language learning effortless and effective. Its strong point is its motivating power, being largely a model that encourages learners to learn language. CACALLA shares the three main beliefs of the CALLA model relating to the use of learning strategies (LS). They are that LS help learners learn language; LS help learners learn through language and most important of all is that LS help learners learn how to learn. This makes for independent or "autonomous" learning, so the current literature says.

Experiencing Powerful English, the title of the textbook series, uses the following rubrics to reflect the model: Talk About It, Tune In, Think It Through, Use Language, Watch Your Language, Say It With a Pen, Activity, and Experience Life. It deserves to be mentioned, too, that unlike a predecessor model, CACALLA does not adhere to the L-S-R-W (listening-speaking-reading-writing) sequence. Believing in naturalistic language use, the sequence with which language is used to communicate is not a hard and fast LSRW. Sometimes one starts to write, or speak, read, or listen. To quote from the textbook,

> In real life, one does not always communicate by listening first, then by speaking afterwards, by reading next, and by writing last. This is why use of any four of the four skills may begin a lesson, may end it, or be a middle activity. Choice of which skill to focus on depends on the situation. It is also worthwhile to note that not all skills are involved in every lesson. The dynamism that comes out of this experience is undoubtedly challenging and interesting.

3. CONCLUSION

CACALLA addresses a major criticism hurled against communicative approaches to language teaching and learning, i.e. that they eschew a firm set of methodology (Johnson, 1985). As seen in the textbook series, as explained in the Preface, and as detailed in the accompanying Teachers Guide (cf. the "Introduction to the Series" and "To the Teacher"), the clarity of the procedures in a CACALLA lesson is made evident. Another feature of CACALLA worth mentioning is its strong motivating force. It has great potential in that it will encourage everybody to want to learn English. Language learning, on the part of the pupils/students, and language teaching, on the part of the teachers, will be both interesting and challenging due in large part to the dynamism and innovativeness of CACALLA lessons. In fact, learning via CACALLA is almost like acquiring a first language, more than learning, as in a formal classroom setting.

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