

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 728

FL 015 421

AUTHOR Muchisky, Dennis
 TITLE The Unnatural Approach: Language Learning in Poland.
 PUB DATE [85]
 NOTE 26p.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Audiovisual Aids; Class Size; *Educational Environment; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Language Proficiency; Language Teachers; Learning Theories; Secondary Education; Second Language Learning; Second Language Programs; Student Motivation; Teacher Education; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Teaching Methods; Testing
 IDENTIFIERS *Poland

ABSTRACT

The instructional settings and teacher-learner relationships observed in English-as-a-second-language classes at the secondary and university levels in Poland by an American senior Fulbright lecturer are characterized by very formal instruction with heavy emphasis on pronunciation and grammar exercises, large classes with little opportunity for individual participation beyond answering questions and reading passages aloud, and no visual aids other than maps and scenic posters. However, motivation to study English is strong. The university's program for English majors is an immersion program, broad-based in content but generally amethodological. Student-teacher relationships are extremely formal, often adversarial. Texts are limited and must often be shared, and although there are film projectors and a language laboratory at the university, materials are limited. Administration of American standardized language proficiency tests revealed a relatively high proficiency level despite the instructional format and limited amount of time spent in language study. By the third year of university language instruction, standardized test scores are in the 91st percentile. The main conclusion from these findings and observations is that, before any comprehensive theory of second language learning can be developed, it will be necessary to investigate the learning process as it occurs in a variety of pedagogical and cultural settings. (MSE)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

THE UNNATURAL APPROACH: LANGUAGE LEARNING IN POLAND

DENNIS MUCHISKY

University of New Mexico

ED264728

Poland represents a situation in which virtually all English proficiency is developed in formal classroom settings. And those classrooms violate literally every principle considered central to good classroom learning: the classrooms are overcrowded, attention is focused upon grammar and pronunciation drills, the relationship between teachers and students can best be described as adversarial, there is continual error correction and a heavy emphasis on rote learning with little concern for meaningful involvement on the part of the learner. In addition, because of the current political and economic situation in Poland, access to native speakers of English and classroom materials in English is limited. Yet in spite of these limitations, Polish students develop a high level of English proficiency.

This paper, which follows a year as a Senior Fulbright Lecturer in Poland, describes the teacher-learner relationships observed at the secondary and university levels and discusses the results of proficiency testing done with secondary (third and fourth year) and university (first through third year) students. It also attempts to account for the proficiency levels within the framework of current methodological approaches and acquisition theories. The central issue is: what factors account for learning in less than optimal conditions?

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dennis Muchisky

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

FLO15421

When I began to teach, I taught English as a foreign language, but for the past ten years my experience has been with English as a second language. I decided to apply for a Fulbright grant not because I was dissatisfied with teaching ESL, but rather because I recognized that my teaching situation at The University of New Mexico's Intensive English Institute is an ideal one. What I hoped to do by leaving the United States was to step back and observe the field from a different perspective. I must admit that I did not anticipate just how different that perspective could or would be. As is obvious from the title of this paper I taught in Poland (during the 1983-84 academic year) at Marie Curie-Sklodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin. While most of my teaching was done with university students, I was able to observe classes in two high schools and also teach a two week seminar in methodology for high school teachers from different parts of the country. The development of English proficiency among Polish students offers a unique perspective from which to view the current theories of second language acquisition and methodological approaches because Poland represents a situation in which virtually all English proficiency is developed in formal classroom settings where literally every principle considered central to good classroom learning is violated.

I would like to first describe the situation which I observed in two high schools in Lublin. I might also add that because of the centralized educational system the instruction in these classrooms fairly well serves as a representative sample of

instructional procedures for the nation as a whole. The classes I observed contained 25 or 30 students and met for either two or six hours a week. Those students who were planning on advanced English study were enrolled in the six hour a week program. While some students begin studying English privately prior to entering high school, for most students the high school classroom is the first sustained contact with English. A number of students continue these private lessons for one or two hours a week during their high school years.

Classroom learning is very formal and is heavily focused upon pronunciation and grammar exercises. British English is the standard and textbooks, while written and printed in Poland, use England as the scene of activity. The texts which I saw used dialogues, sentence completion exercises, oral repetition drills, translation exercises and grammar exercises. Each unit was organized around a reading topic such as "The Tower of London", "The Firey Headed Irishman", and "Gambling for Fun" (Smolska:1978). The teachers often used Polish for explanation - particularly when discussing grammar points - and phonetic transcription was regularly used for introducing new vocabulary items. In fact the chair of the English Department at UMCS was of the opinion that it would be impossible to teach English without phonetic transcription.

Because of the large (at least by U.S. standards) class size, students do not have much opportunity to speak individually during class. Most oral participation comes in the form of answers to questions or in the reading aloud of a passage of text. I saw no attempts at "communication" on the part of either

the teachers or the students. In addition, error correction is seen as a necessary part of the teaching/learning process, and teachers regularly interrupt student replies to make corrections for pronunciation and grammar .

With the exception of some maps and scenic posters, I saw no audio-visual aids. Furthermore teachers have very limited access to copying or duplicating machines as both are controlled by the government. British and American rock music is popular and young people listen to it a great deal. American movies are also popular, but their number is limited by the government. The films are shown either with subtitles or in voice-over: a technique in which a single narrator delivers all the dialogue in Polish while the original sound track is being played at a reduced volume level. English language broadcasts are available on short wave radio transmissions from the BBC and the VOA, but, while the signals are usually permitted in without being jammed, it would not be politically wise to use them in the classroom. In addition to limited audio-visual facilities, both teachers and students have limited access to native speakers of English. Since the advent of martial law in 1981 it has become very difficult for Polish citizens to travel outside of the country, and, in addition, the Polish government has not made it easy for Westerners to travel in Poland.

The situation as described thus far represents a less than ideal environment for language learning, but there are some positive aspects. In fact the decision to study English is prompted by two powerful motivational factors. There is both an integrative and an instrumental reason for the study of English.

While Poland is politically an Eastern European country, many Poles identify strongly with the West and resent the Soviet domination of their country. By learning English a Pole is able to affirm an allegiance to the West and at the same time demonstrate resistance to the Eastern influence of Russia. On the practical side, by learning English a Pole puts him/herself in a position (depending on how well the language is learned) of working in an English department at a university, which though not a high paying job, carries a good deal of prestige. Or, an English speaking Pole might get a job with the national tourist agency or national airline: jobs which are well paying and which offer opportunities for travel. Another motivating factor which encourages the students to do well in classes is the admission procedure used by Polish universities. Prior to entering a university a student must choose a major field and then take an entrance examination given by the department in question. The student who fails the exam or misses the cut-off point for available openings is denied entry to the university.

Briefly then, the situation in the high schools can be summarized as follows: the methodology used is a combination of the grammar-translation, reading and audio-lingual methods. Class size limits active participation, instruction is very structured, there is a large amount of memory work, and error correction is seen as a necessary part of the process of teaching. Materials are hard to come by as is interaction with native speakers. The students are strongly motivated by a combination of integrative and instrumental orientations related to a political awareness which permeates Polish life.

REPRODUCED FROM
 THE ORIGINAL COPY

Though the conditions in Polish classrooms are less than ideal, the description of the instructional procedures could apply to a number of countries. From my own experiences I can say that classrooms in Colombia and Mexico are, in some instances, not very different from those I saw in Poland. What is unexpected was the level of achievement reached by these students.

During the spring semester of 1984 I was able to test students in the third and fourth years of high school and the first, second and third years of the university. Because of their class schedules, the fourth year university students could not be tested. Among the tests administered were the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP)-Form F and the Michigan Test of Aural Comprehension (MTAC)-Form 2. The MTELP is a multiple choice test made up of 40 grammar, 40 vocabulary

 TABLE 1
 MEAN MICHIGAN TEST SCORES

	MTELP					MTAC	
	GRAM	VOCAB	READ	TOT	STD (%)	TOT	STD (%)
HS							
3(n=24)	21.4	15.9	4.1	42	64	**	**
4(n=18)	25.9	16.7	8.1	51	73	(n=17)	55.2 68
UMCS							
1(n=17)	30.7	21.1	12.1	64	84	(n=20)	55.9 68
2(n=29)	32.9	26.9	13.1	75	88	(n=23)	63 78
3(n=14)	35.1	32.1	15.2	83	91	(n=20)	68 81

and 20 reading comprehension items. It has a time limit of one hour and fifteen minutes. The MTAC is made up of ninety taped questions. It is also a multiple choice test and the students

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

must choose the best answer to complete a short dialogue or paraphrase a statement.

I would like to first call attention to the mean scores for the MTELP. The third year high school students scored at the 64th percentile and the fourth year students at the 73rd percentile. As a point of reference, the University of New Mexico requires a score in the 75th percentile on the MTELP for admission. I find these scores to be quite high considering the instructional format used and the amount of time spent in study. Asher (1979) estimates that by the age of six a child has spent 17,520 hours listening to his/her native language and another 2,190 hours speaking it. Asher's figures reduced to cover a four year period would be 11,680 hours listening and 1,460 hours speaking it. The Polish high school students I observed spent 210 hours a year (based on a 35 week school year) in class. Furthermore, the third year students I questioned reported spending one hour a week outside of class speaking English and one and a half hours a week outside of class listening to English. If we additionally allow 2 minutes of speaking time per class for each student then, after 4 years, the Polish students would have spent a total of 1,152 hours listening to English and 213 hours speaking English, or approximately one tenth as much time as native speakers do. As an additional point of comparison, students in the Intensive English Institute's classes who were given the MTELP and the MTAC at the beginning of the Fall 1984 semester had mean standardized scores at the 66th percentile on the MTELP and at the 56th percentile on the MTAC. They also averaged 8 years of English language study at

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

4.6 hours per week compared to the Polish students 3, or 4, years of study at 6 hours per week. The IEI students then have spent 51% more time in English classes than the third year high school students and 35% more time in classes than the fourth year students.

Before discussing the test results any further, I would like to describe the university's program for English majors. The program of study at UMCS can only be described as an immersion program. In the course of 4 years the students will spend 2655 hours in English classes - an average of 22 hours a week. While the students are in classes for over twenty hours a week, those classes are quite short, meeting for either 45 minutes or one and half hours each week. All students have, as a result, classes with as many as ten or twelve different instructors every semester. If the instructional program in the high schools is markedly traditional, the instructional program in the university is markedly amethodological. Of the 2655 hours of instruction only 840 are given to what we would consider EFL classes - listening comprehension, grammar, translation, conversation and composition. The rest of the time is spent in content courses (Mohan, 1979). As freshmen and sophomores, Polish students take the following courses: Introduction to Literary Theory, Literary History of England, History of England, History of the United States, Phonology, Phonetics, Text Analysis, Problems of British Culture and Institutions, Problems of United States Culture and Institutions and Historical Grammar. In their junior and senior years students specialize in Linguistics or British or American Literature. All students take a two semester

CONTINUED FROM
 AVAILABLE COPY

course in methodology and spend two weeks each of those semesters student teaching. The effects of the methodology course, however, are short lived. The university hires its staff from its own graduates, but with the exception of the staff methodologist no one considers him/herself an EFL teacher. They are teachers of English Literature or Linguistics and conduct their classes accordingly. Faculty members teach their practical English classes - that is the EFL classes - with all the disdain of a professor emeritus teaching a freshman composition course.

Relations between teachers and students are very formal both in and out of the classroom and Polish faculty members, as a Polish professor advised a group of departing Fulbright professors, "Never tell students they speak English well." In general my Polish colleagues followed this dictum and, as a result, the relationship between students and teachers was adversarial. There is a 'them against us' feeling which quickly develops and which is encouraged by dividing the students into groups upon their entry into the university. This same group of students remains together for all four years of study and attends (and cuts) all classes together. Error correction is still an integral part of the teaching process at the university level and continues to be so through the Master's defense. The amount of materials available to university students is greater than for the high school students, but those books that are available are frequently limited in number and students often must share texts. The university does have a language laboratory and also film projectors. It is however dependent upon the U.S. and British embassies for films. Contact with

CLINED FROM
LABLE COPY

native speakers is, for most students, limited to visiting faculty. Faculty exchange programs allow one or two faculty members to go abroad for periods ranging from four months to a year.

Turning once again to the test results, it can be seen that the scores on the MTELP rise at a steady rate with each additional year of study to a mean standardized score in the 91st percentile for the third year students. It should be noted that these students still have one more year of language study to complete. In addition to the total scores for the MTELP, the sub-test scores for the grammar, vocabulary and reading sections are also presented. During high school the test scores for the grammar section are higher than the vocabulary and reading scores - a direct result, presumably, of the amount of time spent on grammar instruction. When the students enter the university the scores on the vocabulary and reading sections begin to catch up, and by the third year of university study these differences have leveled off. It is interesting to note that the MTAC scores remain unchanged from the last year of high school through the end of the first year of the university. I had anticipated a major improvement in these scores at this point due to the increased amount of time spent in listening to English. But it occurs instead between the first and second years of university study. The MTAC scores are lower overall for the university students than I had expected, and this may be due to the fact that they are used to hearing British English rather than American English, which is the variety used on the test.

FROM
COPY

The high test scores achieved by the Polish students, particularly the high school students, are surprising in light of Krashen's work (1982) on the Acquisition/Learning Distinction, the Monitor Hypothesis, and the Input Hypothesis. Krashen (1982) argues that second language acquisition is superior to second language learning. According to Krashen, "acquisition is a subconscious process; language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication." (1982:10) Learning however, in Krashen's terms, refers to, "conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. In non-technical terms, learning is 'knowing about' a language, known to most people as 'grammar', or 'rules'." (1982:10)

Moving beyond the Acquisition/Learning Distinction, Krashen proposes the Monitor Hypothesis which,

posits that acquisition and learning are used in very specific ways. Normally, acquisition 'initiates' our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency. Learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance after it has been 'produced' by the acquired system. (1982;15)

In addition to serving only as a Monitor, conscious learning has two additional limiting factors according to Krashen. First,

 REPRODUCED FROM
ERIC

The Monitor does a better job with some parts of the of the grammar than with others. Specifically, it seems to do better with rules that can be characterized as 'simple' in two different ways. First rules that do not require elaborate movement rules or permutations; rules that are syntactically simple....[And second] rules can also be easy and difficult due to their semantic properties.(1982:17-18)

As examples of difficult syntactic rules Krashen cites the Wh-question rule and the Do-insertion rule, and as an example of a difficult semantic item he cites the use of articles (1982:17-18) The final limitation on conscious learning is that, "learning does not turn into acquisition", (1982:83) and so can never become a part of the acquired store of language which is used to initiate utterances.

Building upon the Acquisition/Learning Distinction and the Monitor Hypothesis, Krashen developed the Input Hypothesis (1982) which argues that classroom teaching should provide linguistic input which focuses upon communication so that the students can acquire rather than learn the second language. He opposes a grammatical syllabus in the classroom because, "a grammatical focus will usually prevent real communication using the second language." (1982:26)

The MTELP is a discrete point test, and the grammar section presumably taps the learned rules of English which would be accessible to the Monitor. However, it must be noted that the MTELP contains questions which extend into the range of rules which Krashen has included in his "difficult" category and which

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

should be the least susceptible to monitoring and the least teachable. For example, included as test items on the MTELP are questions which require the correct use of the present perfect and the present perfect progressive tenses, modal auxiliaries, articles and prepositions. Nonetheless, even at the third year of high school instruction, Polish students are answering over 50% of the grammatical items correctly. In addition, though these students have received instruction based upon a grammatical syllabus, they also show some proficiency on the vocabulary and reading comprehension sections of the MTELP which require more than just a knowledge of formal grammar rules. In all, the achievement levels of these students cannot easily be accounted for within the framework of Krashen's (1982) theoretical proposals.

The steady rise of test scores and ultimate level of proficiency I find impressive, particularly in light of the methodology (or lack of it) and of the difficulties, such as limited materials and restricted access to native speakers, under which both teachers and students operate. And it is not just that these students are good test takers; after having spent an academic year with these students in both the classroom and in social settings I can report that they are fluent users of English. The next questions I would like to address are: how can this success be accounted for, and what implications does it have for teaching and learning?

One factor that must be taken into account when discussing the achievement levels obtained by the students is their motivation. The combination of integrative and instrumental

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

motivations of the Polish students is unique, if not in its bases, then in its intensity. Being identified as Western - or at least as not being identified as Eastern - is of vital importance to many Poles. Britain and the United States are truly admired. Also, given the severe economic conditions prevailing in the country, learning English to get a good job is a major motivating factor in and of itself. The contribution of these motivational factors to the achievements of the Polish students cannot, I feel, be overstated. However, while motivation is a major contributor, it would be simplistic to say that motivation is the whole answer, for we have all seen highly motivated failures in our classes.

Moving beyond the obvious factor of motivation to account for successful language learning in Poland, we are confronted by the problem of perspective. Many Polish educators would attribute success to simply doing the correct things in the classroom: teach the grammar of English, assign drills and exercises which allow the grammar to be practiced, require the students to memorize vocabulary, and correct errors when they occur. Our perspective tells us that these techniques will create "drill junkies" - students who are able to do exercises correctly but who do not develop the ability to communicate in another language. Assuming our perspective is correct, what can explain the test scores achieved by the Polish students? A factor which seems to me to be critical in explaining their success is silence. As Judith Gary Olmstead pointed out (1979:185):

Research has shown that language learners
not required to speak immediately - though

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

they are allowed to if they wish - make more significant gains in reading, writing and speaking as well as in listening comprehension, than students required to speak right away in a typical audiolingual approach. The period of delayed oral practice may last up to 3 months or longer, depending on the intensity of classes and the students' readiness.

In Poland, a silent period is not of course a planned part of the curriculum, and the students are in fact required to respond orally; however, because of the large class size and the focus on exercises most of the students' time in high school is spent in silence, listening to the teacher or to other students, and in attempting to understand the language that is being heard. Outside of the classroom, students spend more time listening to English through music, radio broadcasts, and movies than they do in speaking English. Added to this is time spent in reading and writing for homework assignments. In effect, Polish students undergo a very extended if somewhat modified silent period. The silence of the Polish classrooms was very noticeable to me since I have considered noisy classrooms to be indicative of learning in progress. However, in the September 1984 issue of Language Learning, Day reexamines Seliger's (1977; 1983) contention that students who participate in classroom activities - Seliger terms these students High Input Generators (HIGs) - attain higher levels of proficiency than those students who participate less frequently. These less active students Seliger

REPRODUCED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

refers to as Low Input Generators (LIGs). Day found no correlations between classroom participation and achievement, and he ends his article by saying that ... "we remain skeptical of any claims as to [a] positive relationship [between the use of the target language in the classroom and] ... second language proficiency." (p.96) and furthermore, ... "we hold in abeyance judgement on Seliger's claim that while both HIGs and LIGs benefit from formal instruction ... LIGs are dependent on it since they, unlike HIGs do not 'exploit other practice opportunities beyond what is presented formally' (1977:276)." (p.96) The Polish students I observed at both the secondary and university levels would give strong support to the notion that LIGs can use other practice opportunities.

Silence continues to play a role in the university's English program as well. Students entering the university after four years of classes in which they are not accustomed to speaking do not suddenly become loquacious. They continue to avoid speaking when possible. Furthermore, in lecture courses, which comprise close to half of the students' class time, the teacher does all the talking. The students are not expected to ask questions or offer comments. They listen and take notes on the material upon which they are later tested.

In addition to providing a silent period, there is an additional aspect to the university's program which presumably contributes to the high proficiency levels and that is that the students are studying English as a content subject. What occurs at the university is what Mohan (1979) describes as second language teaching by content teaching. "L2 teaching by content

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

teaching is provided when the learner is taught a content subject in the L2 with the intention that he will learn the L2." (1979:173) What is taking place in Poland is a very direct form of content teaching as English is both the second language and the content subject. As with the case of silence, this development is serendipitous since it is not based upon any methodological or acquisitional view of language teaching. It is simply that English is viewed as any other academic discipline and is taught accordingly. Nonetheless the result is that the students are using real language for real communication about real subjects to the benefit of both their receptive and productive skills.

If my interpretation of the situation is correct and a high level of motivation, an extended silent period and teaching language through content courses are the critical factors in accounting for the successes of the students, what are the implications for our views of language teaching and second language acquisition? As a framework for this part of the discussion, I would like to turn to Christison and Krahnke's article in the December 1983 issue of TESOL Quarterly in which they list four principles of good language teaching derived from their analysis of current research in the field. The first principle they cite is:

Language instruction which has as its goal functional ability in the new language should give greater emphasis to activities which lead to language acquisition than to activities which lead to formal learning. (p.640)

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST COPY

This principle, based upon Krashen's (1982) distinction between acquisition and learning clearly gets short shrift in Polish high schools where all teaching is aimed at learning, and this emphasis on learning continues to a lesser extent in the university. The fact that the students do achieve a not inconsiderable level of proficiency has implications for the acquisition/learning distinction. It may be that we underestimate the amount of acquisition that takes place even when instruction is aimed at learning. Or it may be that the division between the acquisition store and the learning store is not as stringent as Krashen proposes, but rather that as Stevick (1980:276) suggests, there is some, "seepage from what is learned into the acquisition store." However, in the case of the Polish students it would be more like flooding than seepage. Long (1983:378-79) argues that:

Perhaps learning involves the experience (obtained through instruction) of treating language as object and the concomitant abilities this brings, including not only the ability to monitor with easy rules but also the ability to improve SL performance in general.

He goes on to say that this redefinition of learning,

would affect the acquisition/learning distinction (by upgrading the importance of learning and thereby of instruction) and also the Monitor Hypothesis.. Failure to broaden the concept of learning ... would mean changing the Acquisition/learning Hypothesis. If

learning retained its currently narrow definition, it would be necessary to posit that learning can become acquisition, a possibility that Monitor Theory rules out.

In Polish high schools given the nature of instruction, the demonstrated proficiency can only be attributed to learning and the proficiency levels go well beyond the beginning level - a situation which the present theory does not account for. In the university, learning is still the primary focus of the the EFL classes; however, the greater part of the program, with its emphasis upon content teaching, can be said to follow principle one more closely in that these classes focus upon communication, which according to principle one and the Acquisition/Learning Distinction leads to acquisition. Nonetheless, the achievements of the Polish high school students would argue for some modification of the current theory, assigning a larger role to learning.

The second principle cited by Christison and Krahnke is:

Because negative affect, in the form of the affective filter, seems to be a major impediment to success in language acquisition and learning, instruction should make the minimizing of such affective interference one of its primary goals.(p.641)

In discussing the Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen (1981:31) places the affective variables into three groups:

MICROFILMED FROM ERIC

(1) Motivation. Performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition...

(2) Self-confidence. Performers with self-confidence and a good self image tend to do better in second language acquisition.

(3) Anxiety. Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety.

As I have indicated, motivation exists in abundance among Polish students; however, teaching seems to be designed to raise anxiety levels rather than lower them, and the constant error correction would seem designed to lower self-confidence rather than raise it. What, I believe, is the main implication of the student/teacher relationships in Poland is that the cause of affective interference is culturally determined. Students and teachers are not expected to be friendly, and, furthermore, it is understood that telling a student that s/he is doing well will not motivate the student to do more work, but to do less work and so would be detrimental to learning. Both sides accept these conditions as givens. As a result, the affective filters of the students are not as high as they appear to be to an American observer.

The third principle offered by Christison and Kranhke is:

Language instruction must make use of the learners' own abilities to acquire language from natural interaction. (p.641)

However, instruction in the Polish high schools makes no use of 'natural interaction'. Instruction in the university does. Both groups develop proficiency and the proficiency levels increase over time. The implication is that perhaps we could modify principle three to read: language instruction should make greater use of the learners' own abilities to acquire language from natural interaction, but if it doesn't then the learners may use their abilities to acquire language from whatever type of instruction is provided.

Principle four states that:

Error produced in the process of acquiring a second language should be viewed as a natural product of the acquisition process, as a source of information on learner strategies and as a problem best addressed through more input and interaction rather than through correction and drill. To concentrate on developing students' abilities to monitor their production, or to enforce correction while students are engaged in interaction or production, should be regarded as counter-productive. (p.642)

A Polish version of principle four would be similar to the following: 'errors produced while speaking a second language are a sign of incomplete learning and indicate to the teacher where corrections must be made. Immediate correction of such errors is necessary if the learner is to progress. Failure to correct these errors should be regarded as counter-productive'. This principle is my rendition, of course, but I feel certain that

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

most of my Polish colleagues would feel more comfortable with it than with the one we subscribe to. Research on error correction (Cohen & Robbins, 1976 ; Hendrickson, 1978) indicates that corrections have little effect. However, it may be plausible to hypothesize that in Poland the type of instruction used creates Super-Monitor Users who are able to respond to the continual correction that is offered. At the very least it seems plausible to claim that in Poland error correction is only non-productive rather than counter-productive.

Language teaching in Poland contravenes, to some extent, all four principles cited, yet it produces fluent users of language. I have offered some thoughts as to why it does so and suggested some implications which its success may have for our own views of language teaching. In closing I would like to mention two issues recently raised by Diane Larsen-Freeman. First, she notes that, "researchers in their models of the acquisition process ignored something...[generally] acknowledged to be vital to our understanding of acquisition - namely, the black box, or how learning takes place..." (1983:3) She continues, "since we can't open up the heads of our learners and peer in and recognize the processes and strategies learners are exploiting, we must make inferences about them based on our knowledge of the learners and what they can tell us." (p.4)

Polish students develop language proficiency in what we consider to be a poor teaching/learning situation. If the proficiency levels attained by the high school students can be attributed to a high level of motivation and a silent period which allows the students processing time, then we must accept

MICROFILMED FROM
BEST AVAILABLE COPY

that the key to learning lies within the students themselves rather than with the form of instruction or the input and that an understanding of the learning processes involved will come from observations of learning in progress.

The final point I wish to make here is also discussed by Larsen-Freeman in the same article quoted above. She writes, "the choice we have ... is between explaining second language acquisition and understanding second language acquisition." (1983:19) In her view, explaining second language acquisition requires believing that ultimately there will be found a single answer to the question of how we acquire a second language. On the other hand understanding second language does not involve the certitude of a single answer.

The manner in which Polish students achieve levels of English proficiency cannot be offered as an 'explanation' of the second language acquisition process, nor can it be an argument for the general validity of the methodologies employed. Furthermore, the successes of the Polish students can only be 'understood' by taking into account the unique conditions which exist in Poland. Yet, while Poland presents a unique set of conditions, Poland itself is not unique unless one is prepared to claim that nowhere else are students developing second language proficiency under less than ideal circumstances. The main lesson to be taken from the Polish situation is, I believe, that before any comprehensive theory of second language learning can be developed, it will be necessary to investigate the learning process as it occurs in a variety of pedagogical and cultural settings.

UNREPRODUCIBLE COPY

REFERENCES

- Asher, James. 1979. Learning another language through actions. The complete teacher's guidebook. Los Gatos, CA. Sky Oaks Productions.
- Cohen, A. and M. Robbins. 1976. Towards assessing interlanguage performance: the relationship between selected errors learner's characteristics, and learner's explanations. Language Learning 26(1):45-66.
- Corder, S.P. 1974. The significance of learner's errors. In New frontiers in second language learning, John Schuman and Nancy Stenson (Eds.), 90-99. Rowley, Mass. Newbury House.
- Day, Richard. 1984. Student participation in the ESL classroom or some imperfections in practice. Language Learning 34(3):69-102.
- Dulay, Heidi and Marina Burt. 1978. Some remarks on creativity in language acquisition. In Second language acquisition: issues and implications, William Ritchie (Ed.), 65-89. New York. Academic Press.
- Krahnke, Karl and Mary Ann Christison. 1983. Recent language research and some language teaching principles. TESOL Quarterly 17(4):625-649.
- Krashen, Steven. 1981. Second language acquisition and second language learning. New York. Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, Steven. 1982. Principles and practices in second language acquisition. New York. Pergamon Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, Diane. 1983. Second language acquisition:

DERIVED FROM
 AVAILABLE COPY

- getting the whole picture. In Second language acquisition studies, Kathleen Bailey, Michael Long and Sabrina Peck (Eds.), 3-22. Rowley, Mass. Newbury House.
- Long, Michael H. 1983. Does second language instruction make a difference? A review of research. TESOL Quarterly 17(3): 359-382.
- Mohan, Bernard. 1979. Relating language teaching and content teaching. TESOL Quarterly 13(2):171-182.
- Olmstead, Judith Gary. 1978. Why speak if you don't need to? The case for a listening approach to beginning foreign language learning. In Second language acquisition research issues and implications, William Ritchie (Ed.), 185-199. New York. Academic Press.
- Seliger, H.W. 1977. Does practice make perfect?: A study of interaction patterns and L2 competence. Language Learning 27(2):263:278.
- Seliger, H.W. 1983. Learner Interaction in the classroom and its effect on language acquisition. In classroom oriented research in second language acquisition, Herbert W. Seliger & Michael Long (Eds.), 246-267.
- Smolska, Janina. 1978. We use English. Warsaw, Poland. Wydawnitwa skolone i pedagogicznne.
- Stevick, Earl. 1980. A way and ways. Rowley, Mass. Newbury House.

FROM
COPY