

Methodological approaches in the didactic second language context

Enfoques metodológicos en el marco de la enseñanza de segundas lenguas

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1. INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented spread of English worldwide and its status as the language of international communication (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2003; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009), also referred to as “the world language” by Seidlhofer (2004: 209), have promoted the implementation of different national and international policies in order to improve L2 students’ proficiency in English. In Europe, the demands brought about by the Bologna Process and the consolidation of the European Space of Higher Education (ESHE) have also emphasized the importance of fostering foreign language learning. This has been especially connected to a growing use of English in tertiary education in order to promote students’ mobility and employability since, as previously stated, English has certainly become the *de facto* international language of trade, economy, tourism, science, technology, research and popular media, among others (Crystal, 2003; Joseba, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Thus, different language policies all across Europe have been adopted to encourage the learning of English at different stages of the education system, which has led to the elaboration of new language syllabuses and to redesign of curricula with a view to improving linguistic educational outcomes. Moreover, following the recommendations of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; Learning, teaching,

assessment (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001), which advocates for the implementation of an “action-oriented approach” based on the development of communicative language competences, different teaching approaches have been developed. Indeed, one of the main goals of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001:1) is to provide a comprehensive description of “what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively”. From this perspective, learners should be able to demonstrate their ability to communicate in the L2 as well as to show a good command of their basic language skills (i.e. reading, listening, writing and speaking). Various methodological approaches have been proposed to achieve these aims, highlighting the importance of promoting positive affective factors (i.e. motivation, attitudes, beliefs and emotions) that are likely to facilitate second language learning (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001; Bernaus et al., 2004; Garrett, 2010; Amengual & Prieto, 2015; Lasagabaster, 2015). This has resulted in the creation of ‘learning situations’ (Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009; Huang, 2011) as well as ‘Optimal Learning Environments’ (Shernoff, 2013), which include, among others, strategies and methods to deal with diversity in mainstream classrooms (‘inclusive education’).

From a communicative perspective, the integration of technological innovation in educational settings has also been gaining global attention. In fact, Chapelle & Douglas (2006:108) point out that: “communicative language ability needs to be conceived in view of the joint role that language and technology play in the process of communication”. Research also suggest that the use of technology in the L2 classroom may enhance the motivation and involvement of already ‘digital natives’ students (Amengual & García-Laborda, 2016; Prensky, 2010; Calle-Martínez et al., 2016; Litzler & García-Laborda, 2016), and can be explored to promote interactiveness and oral communication skills among students from different educational institutions in today’s multilingual and multicultural context (Piker & Rex, 2008; Prensky, 2010; Masiero, 2014).

It goes without saying that, among the wide range of methodological approaches proposed, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been particularly influential over the last decades and, in fact, its adoption has been widely recommended throughout the European Union. CLIL approaches try to integrate foreign language and content-based instruction in a more naturalistic and meaningful communicative environment (Marsh, 2002; Dalton Puffer, 2007; Pérez-Vidal, 2009; Coyle, 2007; Coyle et al., 2010; Ioannou, 2012) and their implementation have proved to be successful across a wide range of instructional settings and educational levels from primary to higher education (Grenfell, 2002; Muñoz, 2007; Coyle et al., 2010; Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe,

2010; Lyster and Ballinger, 2011; Pérez Cañado, 2012; Ruíz de Zarobe, 2015). In Europe, the application of CLIL programmes has also been connected to the promotion of multilingualism (Lasagabaster, 2015; Pérez Vidal, 2015). According to Lim and Low (2009), in an ever-growing globalized context of increasing interdependence and interconnectivity new priority has been given to the need to communicate and be competent in various languages so as to be able to embrace diversity in multicultural and multilingual contexts. Indeed, there has been an increasing need to promote multilingualism across European countries due to the great variety of coexisting languages in the continent. As Lasagabaster (2015: 19) puts it: “there is a widespread belief that Europe’s future must be multilingual”. Interestingly, the spread of English in Europe has also been linked to the promotion of societal bilingualism and multilingualism, in communities which area already bilingual (Hoffmann, 2000; De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Jessner, 2006; Cenoz, 2009; Cenoz, 2013). The emergence of these new social environments has posed new challenges for researchers and educators interested in the complex process of multilingual acquisition or the acquisition of additional languages (Third Language Acquisition, TLA) (see Cenoz, 2003; 2013; De Bot & Jaensch, 2015). This current second language scenario is forcing us to redefine existing theoretical models as well as to adopt new methodological approaches (Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2014) so as to be able to better respond to the needs of multilingual environments in the ‘borderlessness of today’s world’ (Lim Low, 2009: 2).

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

This special issue belongs to a flourishing area of second language research, the field focusing on methodological approaches and the application of new technologies in English as a Second Language. As its title suggests, it examines this booming field by offering new practices and is aimed at both teachers and researchers in this area. Hence, the objective of this monograph is to gather a compilation of works that collect practices and results from different points of view on the methodologies applied in the second language teaching context.

The issue encompasses 8 articles. The first one, from Giménez-Gómez, explores several methods to maintain a beneficial learning atmosphere through the creation of a classroom community. After analyzing relevant literature on the concepts of classroom community and cooperative learning, the author proposes a series of activities and lesson plans which aim at helping teachers and students create a classroom culture and consequently improve student performance. Giménez-Gómez sustains that to help students get involved

in their own learning process by means of a classroom community is through gamification (i.e., combining learning with games). In her study, the author presents the results obtained from the analysis of a questionnaire addressed to students to find out if they felt that their involvement in their own learning process had been enhanced thanks to the classroom dynamics. The analysis revealed that most students were satisfied with the new classroom dynamics and the introduction of cooperative work.

Then, Puigserver starts the second article by doing a review of the numerous research studies concerning the field of inclusion and dyslexia research to create a general view of the concept of Special Educational Needs and disabilities in order to offer an analysis of the difficulties faced by dyslexic students when learning a second language, to help secondary school teachers with guidelines when dealing with dyslexic students in their classrooms. The author delves into features of the so-called “inclusive education” and explores different strategies and methods that are applied to deal with diversity in mainstream classrooms focusing with special interest on the specific difficulties dyslexic students face in foreign language learning.

The third article intends to raise teachers’ concern about the challenges students face when working on the listening skill as well as what educators can do to facilitate the teaching and learning process of this skill. In this sense, Roble sustains that there are at least three main reasons to understand listening as a challenging skill to teach: (1) the complexity of the skill, (2) teachers’ demanding role, and (3) students’ active role. Throughout the three sections of her article, the author explains what the listening process comprises and highlights the internal factors that learners use to deal with the task and succeed in it. In the second section of her article, Roble explores the actions taken by the teachers to help learners to overcome the difficulties the learners face and finally, the author gives guidelines on how learners should be encouraged to take an active role in their learning process and offers a wide range of activities to be put into practice in the pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening stages to that purpose.

The fourth article suggests linguistic intercultural exchange projects between high schools as a solution to three major problems of TEFL during secondary education: motivation, participation and negative emotions in the classroom. In this regard, Serra analyzes in her study these three aspects so as to find out how intercultural linguistic exchanges between educational institutions in the English classroom can help improve the students learning process. The author enhances the use of ICT in the English classrooms in these intercultural linguistic exchanges and highlights the importance of these types of

resources tools which are motivating for students and without which it would not be possible to carry out such projects.

In line with this, Montaner supports in his article the growing use of ICT in the foreign language classroom given the various possibilities which ICT provide in education. In this sense, Montaner conducts a study on 23 students of a Public Professional Training Center in the province of Valencia. An in-depth analysis of two surveys was carried out to verify if written competence improves through the use of *Blogging* as a teaching tool. The analysis revealed that although there is no way to confirm this aim, there has been a significant improvement regarding the reading comprehension competence in technical English, as well as in the acquisition of technical vocabulary in English.

The study of Heath provides some details about the results obtained from a research conducted on four Chinese students aged from five to thirteen years old to study the effect of providing interactional feedback through the use of Total Physical Response gestures to scaffold learner's spoken responses in an online classroom. In a preliminary research the author observed that many of the learners had difficulties in the areas of pronunciation, syntax and lexis. Thus, Total Physical Response gestures were incorporated into the classes as to make the lessons more interactive. The aim of the study was twofold: to verify whether scaffolding enhances students' oral communication skills and to ensure if TPR could be used to scaffold learning and increase student autonomy in problem areas. The results of this study show that TPR scaffolding measures can be applied in order to improve autonomy, oral communication skills and classroom interaction.

The next work focuses on the areas of Content-and-Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) as the two main alternative models for teaching in a bilingual environment within Secondary Education. After a thorough review of the literature on the subject, García-Rodríguez presents what she has identified as the *Reverse Cycle model* , which aims at the creation of final-units projects inside English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction that are both content and language driven. The author highlights the versatility of the model and sustains that it can be easily introduced in our educational institutions.

The closing paper, by Ortega-Durán, provides an overview of research on multilingual acquisition, focusing on some psycholinguistic factors, and describes the unique features of multilingual learners as compared to monolingual or bilingual learners. The author highlights the importance of multilingualism in the educational system as the interaction among different languages is becoming more and more important all around the world. She also sustains that the increasing contact between different languages in a globalized

world motivates a shift of paradigms that have risen in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and that could be included in the teaching of foreign languages with the aim to help learners in their learning process.

3. CONCLUSIONS

English has become the first Lingua Franca in the world despite its limited number of native speakers worldwide. European universities have also done a considerable effort in promoting the number of graduate and undergraduate degrees totally taught in English to encourage the number of international students. Likewise, educational systems worldwide are making sound efforts to increase compulsory bilingual programs. For instance, Madrid (Spain) has about 64% of its primary and about 15% of its secondary schools following bilingual curricula. From a linguistic perspective, this leads to the change of scope and teaching paradigms in core education by providing both a more communicative approach (in regular English language classes) and an academic use of content subjects taught in English.

Having this in mind, this volume intends to address a number of articles which place the emphasis in this new interest for the language and ways of teaching. In this sense, it includes unusual aspects of socio-cultural language learning such as the role of communities of learners, teaching foreign languages to Students with Special Needs, the role of listening (an aspect that is probably the weakest in many countries like Spain), the need to emphasize cross and intercultural communication in and out the classroom – especially through ICT, new approaches to traditional methods such as the Total Physical Response or Project Based Learning, and, finally, the importance of multilingual issues in the educational system. Overall, it makes an excellent collection of very relevant and updated matters that challenge the school system in many countries. All in all, the reader will find not only new information but also topics which undoubtedly will bring food for thought. In that sense, this monographic volume will certainly be of relevance for both teachers in training and especially for active practitioners alike.

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