



Integrating Form-Focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching in EFL Teaching: A Langue-Parole Perspective

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Abstract. While research has advocated for the integration of Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, few studies have provided systematic explanations grounded in linguistic theories for this integration. Using Saussure's "langue-parole dichotomy" as a theoretical lens, this paper systematically compares Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching across three core pedagogical dimensions: teaching objectives, pedagogical activities, and assessment. The study reveals that Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching differ fundamentally, yet the two approaches are complementary in EFL teaching. Specifically, the former is inherently anchored in the cultivation of langue, while the latter is rooted in the development of parole. The study argues that their integration in EFL teaching could address the one-sided shortcomings of each single approach and foster the comprehensive language competence of EFL learners. This study not only deepens the application of linguistic theories in foreign language pedagogy but also provides a theoretical basis for EFL teaching design and the development of balanced assessment frameworks.

Keywords: Langue-parole Dichotomy; Form-focused Instruction; Communicative Language Teaching; EFL Teaching; pedagogy

1 Introduction

Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching are two major pedagogical approaches in second language teaching. Form-focused Instruction, informed by Chomsky's Generative Grammar, aims to draw learners' attention to language forms [1]. In contrast, Communicative Language Teaching, rooted in Hymes' Ethnography of Communication, prioritizes meaningful interaction and the development of learners' communicative competence rather than only focusing on explicit grammar rules or language forms, which enables learners to use language appropriately in real-life contexts [2]. Although many studies have explored the potential integration of these two approaches in teaching practice, most of them remain at the level of ad-

vocating for “integration,” lacking systematic explanation grounded in the fundamental linguistic theories.

Therefore, this paper aims to adopt Saussure’s “langue-parole dichotomy” as the theoretical framework to compare Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching in EFL teaching and to investigate why these two pedagogical approaches should be integrated. Findings of the study may inform pedagogical practices in EFL classrooms.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Form-focused Instruction

Form-focused instruction represents a central instructional approach in second language acquisition. Informed by a variety of linguistic theories including Chomsky’s Universal Grammar [3], Form-focused Instruction proposes that the core objective of language teaching is to internalize linguistic rules. Only when learners truly master these rules can they flexibly generate and understand language in different contexts, just like native speakers [4]. For this purpose, Form-focused Instruction uses explicit and pertinent methods to explain grammatical rules such as prompting and error correction, leading learners to actively perceive and analyze the internal structure of language and hence enhancing learners’ linguistic competence.

In EFL teaching, Form-focused Instruction is primarily practiced in methods like the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) teaching method. It emphasizes language structures, syntactic rules, and formal accuracy, reflected in the teaching methods such as Grammar-Translation Method and structural drills. Its specific teaching forms include Audio-Lingual Method, substitution drills, grammar rules’ explanation and deduction, error correction, and controlled writing. The teaching objective focuses on learners’ mastery of the language system, and student assessment often uses mechanical forms like grammar tests and sentence completion exercises, focusing on the reproduction of language knowledge [5].

2.2 Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching, also known as the Communicative Approach, is one of the dominant teaching paradigms in second language education. It is inspired by an array of theories rising in the mid-20th century such as the framework of Communicative Competence. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Hymes proposes “communicative competence”, which includes not only grammatical knowledge but also pragmatic appropriateness, sociocultural cognition, and communicative strategies [6]. This shows that Hymes’ Ethnography of Communication theory clearly accords with Saussure’s “parole” dimension, which emphasizes the function and appropriateness of language in social interaction [6]. The “SPEAKING” model proposed by Hymes’ theory provides a systematic framework for analyzing speech events [7].

Communicative Language Teaching is deeply rooted in sociolinguistics and the research of second language acquisition, which emphasizes the “appropriateness” and

“acquisition” of language, and argues that teaching should revolve round the functions of language (such as requesting, suggesting, refusing, commanding).

In EFL teaching, Communicative Language Teaching mainly includes specific forms like Task-Based Language Teaching, Content-Based Instruction and so on. The typical classroom activities usually include role-plays, information gap tasks, and problem-solving activities. Its teaching objective focuses on language use in authentic contexts, and student assessment is based on task completion and communicative effectiveness [8].

2.3 Saussure’s “Langue-parole Dichotomy”

Ferdinand de Saussure’s “langue-parole dichotomy” has been regarded as one of the foundational theories of modern linguistics. Saussure divides language into “langue” and “parole”. “Langue” refers to an abstract, shared symbol system, which is social and stable, while “parole” is the individual’s actual application of this system in specific communication, which is individual and dynamic [9]. This binary distinction not only laid the foundation for linguistic research but also offered a profound analytical perspective for understanding the nature of language acquisition and teaching. For example, Chomsky revisited this distinction by proposing the concepts of “linguistic competence” and “linguistic performance”, emphasizing the innate cognitive basis of the language system. Hymes further expands the construct of langue by incorporating social and cultural appropriateness into his theory of “communicative competence” [10].

2.4 The Present Study

Currently, some scholars [5,11] have already pointed out that Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching are not mutually exclusive but can be integrated in the classroom. For example, Lightbown and Spada [5], through numerous studies, find that appropriately incorporating some form-focused exercises into the classroom communicative activities can significantly improve students’ language competence. However, such research often lacks a perspective rooted in linguistic theory to explain the essential differences and inherent connections between the two approaches. Chinese scholar Zhang Huining uses Saussure’s “langue-parole dichotomy” as a perspective to explore foreign language teaching models in higher education [11]. She points out that Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching should be integrated, advocating for the focus on formal accuracy of language in classroom communicative teaching. Guided by the same theoretical perspective, this paper aims to systematically compare the two pedagogical approaches and provide a linguistically grounded justification for their integration in EFL teaching.

3 Method

This study adopts a comparative approach, comparing Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching in EFL teaching across three dimensions, namely, teaching objectives, pedagogical activities, and assessment. Guided by Saussure's langue-parole dichotomy, the study maps the key characteristics of the two approaches onto the distinctions between langue and parole:

Langue corresponds to the linguistic system, formal accuracy, and structural correctness;

Parole pertains to actual language use, communicative appropriateness, contextual practice, and functional effectiveness.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Teaching Objectives

In terms of teaching objectives, form-focused Instruction focuses on helping learners master the English grammatical rules so that they can generate grammatically correct sentences and acquire formal accuracy. For example, when teaching the passive voice, the teaching objective is often set as “mastering the ‘be + done’ structure and its transformation rules”; when teaching tenses, the teaching objective might be clearly defined as “mastering the formation of the present perfect tense (have/has + done) and distinguishing it from the simple past tense (did).”

In contrast, teaching objectives of Communicative Language Teaching lie in developing learners' ability to communicate within authentic sociocultural contexts. Therefore, for the same grammatical points mentioned above, the teaching objectives might be defined as “being able to correctly and appropriately use the passive voice in the academic writing or oral communication to showcase objectivity” and “being able to appropriately use the present perfect tense in travel narratives to express personal experiences and to understand its difference from the simple past tense”.

Consistent with the langue-parole dichotomy, Form-focused Instruction targets langue the stable and cognitive system, while Communicative Language Teaching takes the functionality of “parole” as its core teaching objective, which pursues contextual appropriateness in language expression. As language competence demands both mastery of langue and parole, integrating these two pedagogical approaches is essential for developing students' EFL proficiency.

4.2 Pedagogical Activities

Form-focused Instruction emphasizes the mechanical drills on grammatical structures and language forms. Its common methods include substitution drills, transformation drills, etc. This kind of drills, in essence, involves discrete, decontextualized extraction and repetitive reinforcement of elements within the language system. For example, when teaching comparatives, it always uses repeated adjective substitution drills

around the comparative form; when teaching the subjunctive mood, it always uses lots of sentence substitution drills like “If I were...” There is a typical teaching case: In a middle school’s English class, when teaching “superlatives”, the teacher first presents the basic structural rule “adj. + -est”, and then asks students to practice by doing sentence substitution drills:

Original sentence: “Mrs. Green has the largest house in town. (Substitute the underlined part with the proper forms of the given words: green lawn, pretty garden.)”

Target sentence: “Mrs. Green has the greenest lawn/prettiest garden in town.” [12]

Communicative Language Teaching emphasizes designing authentic tasks. Its advocated teaching methods are to create a “process of meaning construction” where language use is necessary for task progression, such as role-plays, information gap tasks, problem-solving activities. For example, organizing a debate on community environmental problems allows students to use various language resources to state, compare, describe, question, and defend, which can integrate the learning of language structures into the process of task completion.

Through the above analysis, it shows that Form-focused Instruction assumes that mastering system can naturally lead to use, while Communicative Language Teaching advocates reconstructing system during use. However, it’s clear that both approaches have inherent shortcomings: structural drills divorced from “parole” use can turn abstract language system into mechanical rules; students might accurately produce sentences which are grammatically correct, but fail to understand their functional value in real communication, making flexible use in authentic contexts difficult. Conversely, task completion that ignores the “langue” system can turn “parole” use into idiosyncratic expressions lacking conventions, which makes communication difficult to comprehend and fails to achieve orderly progress of language competence. The difference in both methods, in essence, stems from a one-sided emphasis on either “langue” training or “parole” practice. The nature of language itself determines that a single pedagogical method cannot achieve comprehensive language competence development.

4.3 Teaching Assessment

Assessment within the framework of Form-focused Instruction focuses on whether output conforms to predetermined rules; answers are often closed and unique. Typical examples are tasks of filling in the blanks or sentence correction exercises, which have unique answers. For example, after explaining the rules for using the passive voice (be + done) and letting students complete corresponding sentence transformation exercises, the teacher uses a quiz to check their mastery.

Assessment within the framework of the Communicative Language Teaching needs a comprehensive evaluation across multiple dimensions, such as language choice, pragmatic appropriateness, and cultural sensitivity. Therefore, the evaluation is descriptive and open-ended. For example, in a college English speaking class, the teacher designs a “cross-cultural interview” task [13]:

- Scenario: A foreign company job interview.

- Participants: Students act as interviewers and candidates.
- Assessment: The teacher provides comprehensive evaluation based on fluency, pragmatic appropriateness, and cultural adaptability.

These two assessment systems fully reflect two different evaluation models: “*langue* as a self-contained object” and “*parole* as a social process.”

Overall, the above findings accord with prior research on Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching. They provide strong support to the view that the two approaches should be integrated in authentic teaching practices[11]. The analysis of teaching objectives, methods, and assessment confirms that a balanced pedagogical framework can better improve students’ language competence, which accords with Saussure’s “*langue-parole* dichotomy” and demonstrates the necessity of integrated pedagogical design in EFL teaching[5].

The findings also indicate that the essential difference between Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching corresponds to Saussure’s distinction between “*langue*” (static system) and “*parole*” (dynamic use). Form-focused Instruction chooses to sacrifice the diversity of “*parole*” to preserve the systematicity of “*langue*”, while Communicative Language Teaching chooses to set aside the abstractness of “*langue*” to deeply study the complexity of “*parole*”. However, from a dialectical perspective, “*langue*” and “*parole*” complement and reinforce each other. Effective language learning depends on both a clear cognition of the system and continuous adjustment during use. Without system, use will lose its regularity and intelligibility; without use, system will become a dead entity.

Therefore, in the EFL teaching, one cannot simply choose one approach over the other. Instead, it’s important to design a form of “meaningful practice guided by systematic awareness”, that is, when designing authentic communicative tasks, the teacher should consciously guide learners to notice, infer, reflect, and creatively apply the rule resources of the “*langue*” system to achieve a dialectical cycle of “becoming aware of *langue* through *parole*, and then empowering *parole* with *langue*.”

5 Conclusion

This study compares Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching through the lens of Saussure’s “*langue-parole* dichotomy” and reveals that the two approaches complementary in the EFL teaching, each emphasizing one crucial dimensions of the language competence construction. At the theoretical level, the study provides a clear analytical tool (Saussure’s “*langue-parole* dichotomy”) for understanding the two major pedagogical approaches: Form-focused Instruction and Communicative Language Teaching. Practically, it argues that true pedagogical integration should not be a mechanical combination of teaching approaches but rather require designing contextualized learning tasks that serve dual purposes: consolidating learners’ knowledge of the language system (*langue*) and enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in context (*parole*). Future research should could explore how “*langue*” and “*parole*” could be balanced among learners of different educational stages

and proficiency levels in authentic teaching. This would promote the development of EFL teaching in a direction that is both theoretically profound and practically effective.

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