A Five-Feature Language Teaching Proposal

Leonardo Herrera
Universidad Surcolombiana
Neiva, Colombia

Resumen

Which language teaching methodology brings the most benefits to learners in terms of communicative and linguistic competences? This is a question linguists, educational researchers, and teachers continuously ask without reaching a concrete consensus. Perhaps the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach is the preferred response of educators and practitioners. However, do our communicative teaching methods really foster communication practice in the classroom? Is it important to label our teaching approach with a specific name? In this article, I intend to move beyond this label and suggest instead five methodological elements that can be easily implemented in diverse socio-educational contexts. These teaching features correspond to five of the thirty components of the Sheltered Instruction and Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model, which has been adopted in many schools around the world. Because a thirty-component teaching model may become quite overwhelming for teachers and students, a five-feature teaching proposal is herein suggested.

Key words: SIOP Model, Explicit Objectives, Comprehensible Input, Interaction Focus, Learning Strategies, Feedback and Assessment.

Abstract
Propuesta de enseñanza de lenguas basada en cinco componentes
¿Cuál metodología de enseñanza de lenguas ofrece mayores beneficios en términos de desarrollo de las competencias comunicativa y lingüística? Esta es una pregunta que comúnmente se hacen lingüistas, investigadores y profesores, sin lograr dar una respuesta consensuada. Quizás el Enfoque Comunicativo constituiría la respuesta favorita de profesores y practicantes. Sin embargo, ¿nuestros métodos comunicativos realmente promueven una práctica comunicativa en el salón de clase? ¿Es importante etiquetar nuestras metodologías de enseñanza con un nombre específico? En el presente artículo, intento ir más allá de la etiqueta y sugerir un método basado en cinco elementos, el cual puede ser fácilmente implementado en diversos contextos socio-culturales. Estos elementos de enseñanza corresponden a cinco de los treinta componentes del modelo Sheltered Instruction and Observation Protocol (SIOP), que ya ha sido adoptado en muchas escuelas del mundo. Teniendo en cuenta

que un modelo de treinta componentes puede ser abrumador para los profesores y los estudiantes, se sugiere a través de este documento una propuesta basada en solo cinco elementos pedagógicos.

Palabras clave: Modelo SIOP, objetivos explícitos, aporte significativo, énfasis en la interacción, estrategias de aprendizaje, realimentación y evaluación.

Résumé
Une proposition d'enseignement de la langue sur cinq traits
Quelle méthodologie d'enseignement peut offrir de meilleurs avantages pour les apprenants de langue, en termes de compétences linguistiques et communicatives? C'est une question qu'habituellement des linguistes, investigateurs éducatives et professeurs se posent sans trouver une réponse qui leur convienne. Possiblement, la Méthode Communicative de l'enseignement de la langue est la meilleure option pour des éducateurs et pratiquants. Toutefois, la méthodologie qu'on emploie aide-t-elle à nos étudiants à se communiquer en utilisant la langue d'apprentissage dans la salle de classe? Est-il important de remarquer l'approche d'enseignement avec un nom spécifique et séduisant? Avec cet article, je voudrais partager avec vous cinq éléments méthodologiques que vous pourriez utiliser en différentes situations éducatives. Ces traits de l'enseignement correspondent à cinq des trente aspects de Sheltered Instruction and Observation Protocol (SIOP), ce qui a été adopté par beaucoup d'écoles du monde. Étant donné que ce modèle peut-être angoissant pour les professeurs et les étudiants, cette proposition de cinq traits ou proposition basée en SIOP pourrait nous donner la réponse.

Mots clés: Modèle SIOP, objectives spécifiques, données de compréhension, stratégies d'apprentissage, centre d'interaction, rétroaction et évaluation.

A SIOP-BASED PROPOSAL

The SIOP Model started as an instructional alternative to help the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population in the United States meet high academic standards stated in new educational initiatives. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is one of those initiatives that posed serious academic challenges to the rapidly growing LEP population.

SIOP stands for Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol, a research instrument designed to assess the use of specific instructional techniques in the classroom. Teachers were expected to implement these techniques in order to help LEPs develop both their linguistic and

academic skills. Thus, LEPs would be able to match up the academic level of native English speakers.

The functionality of the protocol criteria encouraged SIOP authors to propose its use as a practical language teaching model as well. The criteria contained in the protocol are: defining language and content objectives, using supplementary materials, developing academic vocabulary, modeling academic tasks, using multimodal techniques, implementing learning strategies, scaffolding instructions, promoting higher-order thinking skills, among others. The thirty criteria were grouped into eight main categories: Lesson Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Strategies, Interaction, Practice/Application, Lesson Delivery, and Review/Assessment. All of these teaching criteria were expected to be observed throughout the delivery of a lesson or a series of lessons.

The Model has been positively accepted and widely used in recent decades by school administrators, supervisors, and teachers, not only in the United States but also in other countries around the world. Its implementation has also been extended from the mainstream classes to the ESL and EFL classes, which shows its strengths.

Yet, despite the relevance of each one of the instructional components suggested in the model, some adjustments need to be made in order to meet the needs and expectations of other social contexts. Countries whose demographics is not as heterogeneous as that of the United States or whose mother tongue is not English will need pertinent modifications for the model to be a success. For example:

- If the language learning process is taking place in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, the linguistic objective could be all the teacher needs to consider regarding objectives. That is, the content objective suggested in the SIOP model would not be applicable in this case. However, if the context is that of a bilingual school or an English as a Second Language (ESL) class, the content objectives become a must.

- Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2008) claim, "Effective SIOP instruction involves the use of many supplementary materials that support the core curriculum and contextualize learning" (p. 33). Yet the availability of supplementary materials can be a serious limitation in many educational contexts out of the

United States. Also, those schools that are not bilingual and whose student population speaks the same language, the reference of core curriculum may not bear the same relevance as that of the foreign language itself.

- Jimenez, García, and Pearson (1996) suggest that students with diverse cultural backgrounds may struggle when tackling a text or concept because their schemata do not match those of the targeted culture. However, this concern of linking instruction with students´ background experiences in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) countries like the United States may not raise major concern in countries that are more culturally homogeneous. In these countries, students may share more cultural commonalities than differences. Most American schools are composed of Asians, Latinos, and Americans, to mention some, and therefore to pay close attention to their cultural differences and backgrounds is quite functional. Yet it is not the case of school systems in other countries around the world. Minor cultural traits and differences though can be worked in class without making it a core element in the model implementation.

- Feature 22 of the SIOP model suggests the implementation of activities that integrate all language skills. In this regard Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2008) state, "Throughout the day, English Language Learners (ELLs) benefit from varied experiences that incorporate reading, promote interactions with others, provide the chance to listen to peers´ ideas, and encourage writing about what is learned" (p. 143). I completely agree with this proposal and its supporting arguments. However, many schools present serious constraints in terms of schedules and language teaching philosophies that somehow limit this intention. Also, some English language teachers may feel the pressure of covering the four linguistic skills in a fifty-minute lesson, making the teaching-learning process confusing and frustrating for learners.

The above arguments do not intend to diminish the applicability and effectiveness of the SIOP Model. Instead, what I intend with this analysis is to propose a simplified version of this great approach that can be easily applicable in different cultural contexts regardless of their linguistic configuration, school schedules, or school teaching philosophy.

The straightforward model herein proposed is based on just five SIOP features, which I consider fundamental in a language lesson regardless the existing teaching-learning limitations. These five features do not necessarily have to be followed in a logical teaching sequence, but can be implemented at different times if necessary.

The main purpose of this five-feature teaching proposal is to offer language teachers a simplified but meaningful approach that can be implemented in every single class without major investments in time, material, and training. All it is required is that teachers understand what each feature entails, and start incorporating them in both stages the lesson planning and the lesson delivery. The five elements can be easily applied whether a ninety-minute lesson or a fifty-minute lesson.

Before delving into the details of the 5 components, it is important to highlight that I have made this proposal based on my teaching experience with the SIOP model in schools in the United States of America and in Colombia.

Having said this, the five features suggested in the proposed model are:

1. Explicit Objectives
2. Comprehensible input
3. Student-oriented strategies
4. Interaction focus
5. Feedback or assessment

Explicit objectives

We may think that it is a basic element that any teacher includes when planning and delivering a lesson, and I truly believe that most teachers do include objectives. However, the point here is not just to suggest the incorporation of objectives into the lesson, but to make them explicit to students and class visitors. In other words, objectives cannot continue to be a passive element of our teaching and a passive element of students' learning. Instead, objectives must be active ingredients of the teaching-learning process, a reference point for both the teacher and students. Therefore, I suggest the following actions in the process of making objectives explicit:

- Objectives should be written by the teacher, read by students, and analyzed by both the teacher and students. Objectives should be written, screened or posted on a visible place for students and occasional visitors to read. The teacher will have a student read the objective(s) aloud and will then check for understanding. In case students have problems understanding the objectives, the teacher will provide a general explanation as anticipation to the main topic explanation. However, objectives are to be clearly written so that students can easily comprehend their meaning.

- At the end of the lesson, the teacher and students will come back to the objectives to confirm their accurate articulation throughout the lesson or to suggest actions to better articulate them in the following class. This articulation of objectives may produce a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment in both the teacher and students. However, if objectives are not met, the teacher will honestly and responsibly propose an explanation or an action. As the teacher gets to know his/her class better in terms of linguistic and cognitive skills, falling short of objectives will become less frequent.

- Since objectives are suggested as active elements of the lesson, they must be written in a simplified but meaningful manner. Simplified does not mean to write short statements. It refers to the fact that objectives should be stated in words that are easy to comprehend by learners. Simplified also refers to the fact that objectives must be observable and achievable in a class period. We should avoid stating objectives that are too complex or abstract. The objective statements must portray a clear articulation between the input and the outcome. That is, objectives will tell students what is expected from them at the end of the class.

- The number and length of objectives can only be determined by the acute and professional concept of the teacher. Yet, a list of more than two objectives for a single class period may put some pressure on both the teacher and the students. Also, in order to avoid complex statements, teachers should make the effort to synthesize objectives in short sentences.

- The process of wording objectives is determined by different teaching aspects. As suggested by Echevarría, Vogt, and Short

(2008), objectives can be stated in terms of key vocabulary, language functions, language skills, grammar structures, learning strategies, or lesson tasks. Teachers should not be afraid of looking too grammatical. The main point of working class objectives out is to achieve a clear articulation between them and the outcome, and that students become aware of this. Hopefully, students will learn how to transfer objectives from their class to other facets of their lives. As Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) put it, "It (goal setting) is a skill that successful people have mastered to help them realize both short-term and long-term desires." (p. 93)

Comprehensible input

Learning a foreign language entails opening the door to a new world; a new world of signs, rules, concepts, customs, values, etc. The learning of this new set of signs can become overwhelming if teachers do not take the necessary steps to ease learners into the process. A pivotal action in this direction is what Dr. Stephen Krashen called Meaningful Input. By Meaningful input he meant all the adjustments the instructor must make in order for the information or input to be comprehensible for learners. Using the metaphoric terms of Lee and Vanpatten (1995),

> Input is to language acquisition what gas is to a car. An engine needs gas to run; without gas, the car would not move an inch. Likewise, input in language learning is what gets the "engine" of acquisition going. Without it, acquisition simply doesn't happen.(p.38)

That is why input has to be made comprehensible for learners, or "Simplified" as Hatch puts it. Hatch (1983) states that input has to be simplified in 5 different aspects: rate of speech, vocabulary, syntax, discourse, and speech setting. These 5 categories will allow learners greater access to the unknown zone.

Whether meaningful or simplified input, following are actions I recommend teachers to follow:
- Modify speech features such as intonation, rate, grammatical structures, and lexicon, among others so that neophytes or even more experienced language learners can access the interaction

without being discouraged. This speech adjustment needs to be done without sounding too unnatural and according to students´ level of language proficiency. As they become more proficient, teacher can utter more elaborated statements in a more fluent fashion.

- Increase the non-verbal communication when presenting new information or interacting with students. The non-verbal communication will play the function of complementing and reinforcing the explanation of words or tasks that are new or too abstract to students.

- Use visual aids such as graphic organizers, pictures, maps, real objects, etc. Some learners may find in visuals the learning channel they do not find in words. A written model exercise or example may also constitute a significant visual aid for learners.

- Use communication strategies such as repetition, paraphrasing, circumlocution, cognates, and the like, especially with beginning students. This action not only helps students comprehend the input more easily, but also trains them on the use of compensation strategies in their L2 communication. As for cognates, teachers have to be resourceful enough to resort or choose lexicon that may have transparent equivalents in students' first language. Therefore, the use of idioms or colloquial expressions is discouraged. Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2008) suggest that "cognates are often useful in promoting comprehension for students whose native language has a Latin base." (P.81)

- If possible, after a task has been explained, ask students to paraphrase it. This course of action can transform the comprehensible input approach into a more interactive or negotiated input approach, in which learners become more active participants. In this regard, Hatch (1983), as cited by Cathcart-Strong (1986), suggests that input becomes more meaningful when learners are given the opportunity to nominate the conversation and the interlocutor (the teacher or a native speaker (NS) will just join in.) The author explains that if the NS nominates the dialog, the learner may fail to identify or follow the topic.

These are just a few suggestions of what teachers can do to scaffold the grasping of new and sometimes complex information. Teachers must regard the adjustment of input as an essential element in their teaching exercise. As Krashen (1982) stated:

> The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production. (p. 14)

Learning strategies

According to Chamot and O'Malley (1990), learning strategies are "special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies (LLS) as "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning" (p. 1). Other researchers have also undertaken the task of defining what LLS entail and in this process they have failed to reach a consensus, as they also have with other aspects of the LLS theory. Yet the point here is not to describe thoroughly these theoretical discrepancies, but to focus on the benefits of using LLS in the classroom from my perspective of teacher and learner. That is, I will describe the LLS benefits I have witnessed throughout my experience in learning and teaching foreign languages.

As observed in the above definitions, LLS are pivotal determinants of learning and therefore their use should be made explicit to learners. My suggestion is to make the teaching of learning strategies an explicit process so that students can have a repertoire of learning actions they can undertake when tackling an academic challenge or a communicative task. This communicative task does not necessarily have to circumscribe to educational settings, but to any communicative situation a person experiences in their everyday life.

The explicitness approach allows students to have the opportunity to train on the use of LLS and make sense of their applicability and effectiveness. The teacher is responsible for providing the context in

which these strategies can be implemented. However, it is up to learners' autonomy and motivation to continue implementing these strategies beyond school. Grenfell and Macaro (2007) state as one of the main claims in the field of LLS research the fact that "strategies can be taught and learners, as a result, can develop more effective strategic behavior" (p. 27).

By using different social, cognitive or metacognitive strategies, students can become autonomous learners with the capacity to use any linguistic or metalinguistic resources they have at hand. For example, by learning and understanding the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), learners will be able to find out the pronunciation of any English word even if there is not a teacher around. All they need is just to read the phonemic transcription they learned in class and sound out the pronunciation. It is like a "learning to read" process. They can implement this strategy at home or even while riding the bus if they have a dictionary at hand. In this regard, Oxford (2003) states, "When the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit his or her learning style and the L2 task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning" (p. 2). This is a process of habit formation which can be used all throughout one's life, not only in academic circumstances but also in personal decision-making situations.

Within the repertoire of learning strategies we can mention self-monitoring, resourcing, note-taking, inferencing, compensating, and using resources, among many others. Besides the cognitive and metacognitive strategies, Oxford (2001) also suggests the social, affective, memory-related, and compensatory strategies. These different types of strategies are intended to form a competent individual in all realms of his or her life.

In order to successfully implement LLS in the classroom, teachers are required to either receive training on how to use them or read relevant and pertinent literature on the topic. Both the teacher and students will make the most out of LLS as they become keener in their use. It may be a matter of consistent practice. Meanwhile, following are some suggestions regarding the implementation of LLS.

- LLS should be made explicit to students. Remembering the name and functionality of a strategy will allow students to recall the course of action to take in a future event. At least,

at the beginning stage of the learning process, consistently recalling the name of a strategy can help students internalize it. In this regard, Oxford and Green (1995) state, "The best learner training includes an explicit and clear focus on specific strategies, has frequent practice opportunities for strategies, is integrated with regular classwork, and shows students how to transfer strategies to new situations" (p. 263).

- In the process of making the strategy explicit to students, the teacher is responsible for presenting it, modeling it, and providing multiple opportunities for students to implement it.

- In order to make students become aware of the strategies, it is recommended that only one strategy be presented in a class period, or at least one strategy should be explicit in case several strategies are used in class.

- Both the teacher and students can actively discuss over possible learning strategies to use in specific situations. This action will also contribute with students' awareness and internalization process.

- It is helpful that teachers record their experience using LLS in the classroom so that in future teaching they can propose strategies that have proven to be feasible and functional. Teachers can log their observations as well as receive feedback from students' own experience using LLS in and out of the class.

Obviously, before embarking learners in the process of using LLS, the teacher himself needs to acquire a good repertoire of LLS or perhaps become aware of strategies that they have been already using in their teaching exercise. To achieve this, teachers can read LLS literature or attend workshops on the subject. Once they have enhanced their knowledge of LLS, they will start training their learners on this aspect. It may be time-consuming at the beginning, but very rewarding at the end. The knowledge that can bring the review of LLS literature plus the experience from consistently using the strategies will enable teachers and learners not only to draw the path to successful L2 learning, but also the path to other types of learning through strategy transfer. Thus, strategic learners will be in greater capacity to guide other people in the direction of effective learning. As Chamot (1998) states,

Good language learners are more strategic than less effective language learners. By "strategic" I mean that they are better able to figure out the task requirements and are flexible in their approach to solving any problems they encounter while working on the task. (p. 3)

Interaction focus

Pica (1996) describes Interaction as "the context and process through which language can be learned" (p. 2). This type of interaction has been traditionally implemented through verbal exchange between the teacher and the student or through memorized dialogs in student pairs. The teacher-student type interaction has been characterized by the teacher doing most of the talk and the student responding in single-word answers.

Modern communicative language methodologies such as the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT), the Task-based Language Approach (TBA), and the SIOP Model, among others place interaction as a fundamental factor that enhances language learning. Vygotsky (1978), as cited by Oxford (1997), affirms: "An individual's cognitive system is a result of communication in social groups and cannot be separated from social life" (p. 448). As it is widely known, interaction is a pivotal factor in Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development.

Through social interactions, students can transform input into output; collaborate, provide and receive feedback; negotiate meanings, and rehearse real communicative situations in the L2. Social and communicative interaction allows learners to feel part of a learning community, which can in turn trigger their L2 learning motivation.

Interaction can be played among students, with the teacher, with classroom guests, and any other person beyond the academic setting. Thus, students can find many linguistic and social benefits in the L2 interactions proposed by the teacher. Following are then some suggestions for teachers to promote meaningful interaction in the L2 classroom:

- Plan activities or tasks that promote guided as well as spontaneous interaction. These tasks can be implemented gradually according to the level of complexity. Think of activities that resemble real-life communication acts, or tasks

that require thought processing similar to those used in real communication situations. Activities that can be suggested towards this purpose are: interviews, dialogs, skits, role plays, surveys, and internet-based tasks.

- Do not correct mistakes on the spot. That is, avoid making corrections while interactions are taking place. Rather, take notes of significant mistakes and provide general feedback at the end of class. If possible, have the class analyze their own mistakes. Collective and collaborative mistake-correction will help create a learning environment in which learners are willing to take risks with no fear of mistakes. It is clearly understood that students are usually afraid of speaking for the fear of being corrected or ridiculed in front of the class.

- Make sure all students are having ample opportunities to actively participate in class activities. Beginning with pair work or small groups and then moving into whole-class discussions can be very helpful for shy or weak students. Be cautious of not letting the most outspoken students take over class discussions. Learn to recognize when shy students want to talk. They will sometimes signal it by eye communication or by a subtle move of their hands. Subtly persuade them to voice themselves in class.

- In order to create a comfortable learning environment, arrange the classroom in a non-traditional manner. Hang posters or even students' projects, a more economic choice, and arrange classroom seats in a way that eye contact can be maintained among all class participants, and interaction can be thus more feasible. If both the room and the class size allow it, organize students' seats in a circular or semicircular fashion. As Oxford (1997) states, "The classroom's physical environment greatly affects the interaction taking place within it" (p. 451).

- Reinforce the task explanation with interaction you can carry out with a student. It will help students comprehend more easily the task steps and expected outcome. The teacher must be a great facilitator of the interaction process by being visible and approachable for students, especially weaker or shy students. As Johnson (1995) suggests, "students need enough instructional support from their teachers to be able to participate successfully in language-related activities that are beyond their current proficiency level" (p. 100)

For decades, people have taken language classes in school, yet all they can remember from those lessons is just a few words, or in the best cases, a few phrases. That is the consequence of learning the language with an exclusive orientation to grammar, translation or meaningless communication. If we want to change this reality, L2 teachers have the challenge to plan and implement tasks that promote meaningful communication. They also have the challenge to reduce their class talk dominance and empower students to take over it. If all of these recommendations are considered, teachers and students will have found a channel through which the target language can be used in more authentic and effective ways.

Feedback and assessment

It is at this stage when the teacher and the students should go back to the objectives to analyze how articulated these were throughout the lesson. If objectives were not met, the teacher will provide an explanation or a plan of actions to reach them in a following lesson. It is at this stage where the explicit definition of objectives will make sense to learners. That is, students will learn that there is a beginning and an end, that whatever vocabulary or grammar structure they have targeted will have an articulation momentum. The habit of explicitly defining objectives and working towards them can be transferred by students to other aspects of their life, especially in the case of many teenagers who sometimes do not know where they are heading for.

When students observe through the assessment and feedback process that they regularly arrive to expected outcomes, they will probably feel higher appreciation for learning, for the teacher, and for themselves. Thus, the process of providing feedback and assessment constitute a multidimensional learning stage that can bring significant benefits to students, teachers, school administrators, and even educational policy makers.

Yet, it is necessary to understand what we mean by feedback and assessment in this proposal in contrast to how these concepts are commonly perceived. Assessment has been traditionally regarded as the process of evaluating students' knowledge at the end of a learning or grading period. This type of assessment is known as summative

assessment. In the field of L2 learning, assessment has followed a similar perspective resorting repeatedly to multiple-choice tests as the most reliable evaluation type. Taras (2005) defines summative assessment as "a judgment which encapsulates all the evidence up to a given point. This point is seen as a finality at the point of the judgment" (p. 468).

The present proposal approaches assessment and feedback from a different perspective. Assessment and feedback are regarded as formative and ongoing processes that provide meaningful information for both the teacher and the student. Summative types of tests are also considered as part of assessment, but these do not constitute the only evaluation mode. An assessment process must depict a clear description of individual learning processes, beyond a numeric grade or concept, which may serve to keep track or make adjustments. The feedback must serve as the means through which assessment insights are shared. Teachers are usually in charge of both assessment and feedback, yet learners can be empowered to take over these processes as well. It is through feedback that teachers can realize how well they are reaching their students. A teaching-learning process that lacks assessment and feedback from students can turn into a blind process in which the teacher may ignore learning orientation and needs.

The proposal is then to make of L2 learning assessment an integrative and multidimensional process. As for the integrative aspect, both summative and formative assessments can be used to obtain a clearer picture of learning achievements and needs. As for the multidimensional aspect, all evaluation means and types must be considered (portfolios, narratives, interviews, real-life communicative tasks, oral presentations, narratives, and even multiple-choice type tests) as well as linguistic domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). These different dimensions will allow teachers, students, parents, and all participants in the educational process to be better informed of the learning progress. This will be done through different feedback sessions.

This is the way that the proposed assessment and feedback process intends to move away from the traditional multiple-choice assessment approach. In this regard, O'Malley and Valdez (1996) have suggested that "teachers, administrators, and education policy analysts have been concerned that the knowledge and skills students need to function

effectively in a future technological and complex society are inadequately represented in multiple-choice tests" (p. 15).

Thus, following are some suggestions regarding the implementation of assessment and feedback in the L2 classroom:

- Plan different types of assessment considering the possibilities as well as the limitations the educational setting presents. Space and resource limitations sometimes force teachers to be creative when planning instruction and assessment. Assessment can be done individually, in pairs or in groups; these can be done orally or in writing; graded or non-graded. Examples of assessment types are: class participation, portfolios, projects, interviews, essays, dialogs, skits, self-assessment, multiple-choice tests, etc. These multiple forms of assessment constitute, according to O'Malley and Valdez (1996), authentic assessment.

- Record students' positive behaviors during the learning process whether in or out of the classroom. Sometimes we as teachers tend to focus solely on the negative traits and disregard significant indicators of learning. Sharing positive feedback with students may help them be aware of linguistic skills they possess while triggering their L2 learning motivation.

- Target students' meta-cognition by implementing some type of self-assessment. This will help students identify their learning styles and monitor their own progress. Students can also share their insights regarding the teaching process. It may offer the teacher an unknown perspective.

- Plan projects in which varied skills (artistic, linguistic, etc.) can be applied. Conduct exhibitions or shows through which students may proudly share their products.

- Even though planning is essential for instruction and assessment, we cannot forget that there are many spontaneous and informal ways to assess students. Different student behaviors may be used as significant learning indicators.

- Be approachable to students. Good communication with students constitutes ongoing and meaningful feedback. This communication must be done in terms of appreciation, honesty, and respect.

Many more insights could be provided regarding feedback and assessment in L2 learning, and the multiple benefits these actions bring.

As Wormeli (2006) states, "Assessment and feedback, particularly during the course of learning, are the most effective ways for students to learn accountability in their work and in their personal lives" (p. 1).

Thus, the summarized principles stated in this proposal are intended to describe an integrative, multidimensional, and ongoing L2 assessment process; in which all participants become responsible for the success or remedial actions of the teaching and learning process.

The five teaching elements described above have been already compiled and proposed in different language teaching methodologies such as the SIOP Model and the Task-based Approach. Yet, these principles have been presented through this paper in a less demanding format so that any foreign or second language teacher can follow them regardless of environment limitations. That is, the five components can be universally implemented whether the language is taught as a foreign or second language; whether the class is ninety or fifty minutes long; whether the school is located in India or in Argentina; whether at a high school level or at an elementary school level; and the like.

Explicitness of objectives, meaningful input, focus on interaction, implementation of learning strategies, assessment and feedback do not constitute innovative teaching actions at all, yet their conscientious and consistent application by the teacher may produce unexpected positive results in learners.

References

Cathcart-Strong, R. (1986). Input generation by young second language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20, 515-530.

Chamot, A. (1998). Teaching learning strategies to language students. Retrieved 4 November, 2011, from ERIC http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED433719.pdf.

Chamot, A. & O'Malley, M. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Echevarría, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. (2008). *Making content comprehensible for English learners*. The SIOP model (3rd Ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Grenfell, M., & Macaro, E. (2007). Claims and critiques. In A. Cohen and E. Macaro (Eds.) *Language learner strategies* (pp. 9-28). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Hatch, E.M. (1983). Simplified input and second language acquisition. In R.W. Andersen (Ed), *Pidginization and creolization as language acquisition* (pp. 64-86). Cambridge, MA: Newbury House.

Jimenez, R, García, G., & Pearson, P. (1996). The reading strategies of Latina/o students who are successful English readers: Opportunities and obstacles. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31(1), 90–112.

Johnson, K. (1995). *Understanding communication in second language classrooms*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. University of Southern California. Pergamon Press Inc.

Lee, J. & Vanpatten, B. (1995). *Making communicative language teaching happen*. New York: Mc-Graw Hill, INC.

Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

O'Malley, M., & Valdez, L. (1996). *Authentic assessment for English language learners. Practical approaches for teachers*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Oxford, R. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction: three communicative strands in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81 (4) pp. 443-456.

Oxford, R. (2001). Language learning styles and strategies. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (3ed ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle. Thompson International, pp. 359-366.

Oxford, R. (2003). *Language learning styles and strategies: An overview*. Oxford, Gala.

Oxford, R. & Green, J. (1995). A closer look at learning strategies, L2 proficiency, and gender. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(2) pp. 261-297.

Pica, T. (1996). Second language learning through interaction: multiple perspectives. Retrieved 6 November, 2011, from Eric http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED401756.pdf

Taras, M. (2005). Assessment: summative and formative: some theoretical reflections. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 53, pp. 466-478.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wormeli, R. (2006). Accountability: Teaching through feedback and assessment, not grading. *American Secondary Education*, 34, 14-27.

Sobre el autor

Leonardo Herrera Mosquera

Profesor Asistente de la Universidad Surcolombiana, Neiva, Colombia. Miembro del grupo de investigación Aprenap del Programa de Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera-Inglés, Universidad Surcolombiana. Licenciado en Lenguas Modernas y Administrador de Empresas; Magíster en TESOL. Áreas de interés académico: lingüística aplicada, TESOL, didáctica del inglés, gramática española.

Correo electrónico: lehemos@hotmail.com