

INTERACTION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: AN  
INVESTIGATION INTO MCCARTHY'S 'THREE IS'  
PEDAGOGICAL MODELLING  
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*Introduction*

In the field of language teaching popular with coursebooks writers, teachers and learners is the so called 'Three Ps' approach, a methodology that organises the teaching of a linguistic item in three distinct stages: Presentation of the item, Practice of the item, and finally Production of the item (Tomlison, 1998). The popularity of this approach can be explained by its simplicity and straightforwardness, by the logical sequence of clearly defined steps that seem to lead successfully to language acquisition. However, many researchers have pointed out at its limits and deficiencies, claiming that this model does not account for the complexity of the process of language learning. Contemporary research shows that the acquisition of linguistic structures and functions "takes much longer than this approach suggests and that far more experience of the item in communication is needed for any lasting learning to take place" (Tomlison, 1998, p. xii).

Researchers have proposed alternative methodologies more in line with current studies in the field of Applied Linguistics. This article will examine the methodological proposal of McCarthy (1998), the 'Three Is', and will evaluate it by considering research studies in the area of language acquisition. In the first section a presentation of

this pedagogical modelling will be made, and its features described, with particular reference to the *Interaction* stage. The concept of Interaction is at the core of many theoretical approaches to explaining language acquisition therefore the next sections will examine the most significant studies that support its importance in the learning process in general, and in the language learning process in particular. Another key issue relevant to the analysis of McCarthy's position is that of the role of language awareness and consciousness-raising activities in promoting language learning and one section will examine how these activities are treated pedagogically. Finally, conclusions will be drawn regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the 'Three Is' pedagogical modelling.

### *1. The 'Three Is' pedagogical modelling*

McCarthy (1998) argues the need to put spoken language right at the centre of the syllabus, if learners are to be taught to speak properly in a foreign language. In order to foster an appropriate transfer of discourse features across different languages he maintains that learners have to acquire a cultural awareness that can be the only guarantee of success. This cultural awareness can be created if learners are exposed to material that reflects real features of the spoken language.

McCarthy notes that although there is a greater emphasis nowadays on teaching speaking skills in English language classes, it is something of a paradox that the use of spoken language is fostered

through texts that mostly reflect features of the written language. To support his point of view he presents different grammatical features of spoken texts which considerably differ from those typical of written texts. Among the features analysed there are verb forms used in narrative patterns, vocabulary used in repetition and negotiation of topic, use of idioms, left dislocation, and indirect speech.

While waiting for publishers to produce more real spoken language extracts as resources for teachers and learners, the best course of action would seem to be to expose learners to natural spoken data whenever possible and to help them to become observers of the grammar of talk in its natural context. At this point the deficiencies of the traditional ‘Three Ps’ methodology (Presentation-Practice-Production) become evident as it is impossible to teach learners to replicate discourse features and functions: “Follow-ups in exchanges, transaction boundaries and interruptions, to name but a few features, cannot simply be taught via the traditional ‘Three Ps’ methodology” (McCarthy, 1998:67).

An alternative methodology is proposed, based “on the convenient mnemonic of the ‘Three Is’ (Illustration-Interaction-Induction)” (McCarthy, 1998:67). Illustration means learners look at real chunks of language, at real data as collected in the different corpora of spoken language available. This stage should produce appropriate and motivating responses in learners.

A crucial stage then follows, Interaction. Learners and teachers analyse together the material, talk about what they notice, try to form

views. It is the moment when discourse awareness activities are brought to the fore, e.g. activities which focus on particular discourse patterns in the language under examination. Through observation learners are asked to comprehend and formulate the rules governing linguistic phenomena. Finally, during the Induction stage, conclusions are drawn about the features of the language analysed.

McCarthy (Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Carter, Hughes & McCarthy, 1998) also notes that it is likely that the analysis into grammatical structures of spoken language will present some areas of grammar not in terms of yes/no alternatives but rather in terms of probabilities and possibilities. Students will learn that particular forms are exclusive or more typical of spoken contexts, and that their use involves a more interactive and affective orientation. They will also notice that some areas of grammar are probabilistically appropriate rather than absolutely correct, and that there are cases when their choice will be between an informal, interpersonally-orientated form, and a more formal alternative. This means that it is perhaps more proper to talk of tendencies, variable rules and choices than of fixed rules when spoken language is the object of analysis.

The merits of McCarthy's pedagogical modelling can only be truly assessed by analysing how the role of interaction is considered pedagogically in contemporary research on language learning.

## *2. Sociocultural theories on the role of interaction*

The sociocultural theory based on the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, who worked in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s, claims that cognitive development and learning originate in a social context (Vygotsky 1978, 1986). Vygotsky believed that higher psychological functions, such as learning, develop in interaction between individuals. He hypothesized the existence of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where functions learnt in a social dimension are transferred to a cognitive dimension. An implication of this theory is that a learner learns under the guidance of an expert, who provides assistance and support by adjusting the difficulty of the task. Since also a language classroom can be considered as a social environment, the phenomena of interaction which take place there can be analysed in the light of this theory. Sociocultural theorists have expanded Vygotsky's findings by concentrating more on the actual process of learning. They have proposed to view teaching as an example of the process of assistance to learners through the Zone of Proximal Development.

Wood, Bruner, & Ross (1976) have put forward the metaphor of scaffolding to refer to the strategies carried out by an expert who wants to adjust a task to the level of competence of a learner. These strategies include proposing a form of the act to be performed; raising and maintaining the learner's interest; simplifying the task; correcting the results, and reducing the stress during the learning process. Another fundamental concept is that of prolepsis, which refers to presupposition of some knowledge on the part of the speaker. The

listener is challenged to interact with the speaker in order to get the supposed information.

Anton (1999) has shown how it is possible to take advantage of these theories to support a teaching methodology based on the central role of interaction in the process of learning a foreign language. Teachers can be considered as the experts capable of providing the necessary “scaffolded” assistance to students, and of guiding them through the learning process. In addition, such a social context as the classroom provides opportunities for interaction not only between teachers and learners, but also among learners themselves, who can thus benefit of further opportunities of assistance from their peers. The researches conducted by Anton in language classes seem to prove that a learner-centered environment that provides plenty of opportunities for interaction can support learning. Through interaction with learners, teachers can construct a scaffold that enables the learners to find solutions to the problems they are facing. It is particularly interesting to observe how one of the teachers in Anton’s study guides learners to notice consciously the linguistic form under observation throughout the interaction. Teacher and learners are shown constructing a shared understanding of the language forms under discussion. They share not only responsibility for solving linguistic problems, but also responsibility for the learning of the whole class, which is successfully turned into a community with shared responsibility for learning. It is not only the teacher that gives advice on the best learning strategies, the students themselves are

encouraged to share their ideas about how to cope with problems. Learners can thus improve their chances of learning by using each other as resources, in a classroom setting that provides every opportunity for interaction.

The effect of learners' collaborative dialogue in language learning has been reported to be as effective for learning as interaction between teacher and learners by several other studies. For example, DiCamilla and Anton (1997) analyzed the discourse of some dyads of Spanish second language learners collaborating on a writing assignment. Their results showed the importance of co-constructed scaffolded support and guidance through peer dialogue. Storch's (1999a, 1999b, 2002) examination of the nature of peer assistance in pairs working together on language tasks resulted in the identification of four types of relationships amongst pairs: collaborative; expert-novice; dominant-passive; and dominant-dominant. The adoption of a collaborative orientation led to scaffolded assistance and language development. Finally, Alcón Soler (2002) has investigated the effect of teacher-students versus learners' interaction on the development of learners' pragmatic competence in an EFL class in a Spanish University. Results show that peer interaction favours some of the functions of learners' output, such as noticing and hypothesis testing.

### *3. The interactionist approach to explaining first language acquisition*

In line with Vygotsky's theories, other researchers have stressed the importance of interaction in determining the language development of small children.

The theoretical view of first language acquisition known as the Interactionist position maintains that language develops "as a result of the complex interplay between the uniquely human characteristics of the child and the environment in which the child develops" (Lighbown & Spada, 1999:22). Interactionists study the so called 'Motherese' or 'Caretaker Speech' - the language that is addressed to little children and modified to make it easier for them to understand.

Some of the characteristics of this child-directed speech are the following:

- Slower rate of delivery
  - Higher pitch
  - More varied intonation
  - Use of shorter, simpler sentences
  - High level of redundancy
  - High level of paraphrasing
  - 'Tutorial questions' - answers known
  - Well formed, with few ungrammatical sentences or sentence fragments
  - Topics limited to the child's immediate environment or to experiences which the adult knows the child has had
- (Snow and Ferguson, 1977)

The importance of this modified interaction has been proved by studying cases where it was missing, such as the case of Jim, the hearing child of deaf parents (see Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Jim had no conversational partners up to the age of three years and nine months, and his only contact with oral language was through television. When researchers tested his level of language this appeared to be much below that normal for children of his age. Jim tried to express his ideas in an unusual and ungrammatical way. This situation dramatically changed when the child began conversational sessions with adults. In a few months most problems had disappeared, and Jim's language was not below that of other children at that age. His brother Glenn, when tested at the same age Jim had first been tested, didn't show the same problems, because he had had Jim as a conversational partner to practice the language.

The case of Jim supports the view that exposure to passive sources of language such as television alone is insufficient for the child to learn a language. Child-directed speech, which is continuously modified to meet the needs of the particular child, and plenty of opportunities for interaction seem to be the key factors leading to language acquisition.

#### *4. The interactionist position on second language acquisition*

In line with the first language theory that gives great importance to child-directed speech, some interactionist theorists maintain that second language acquisition takes place through

conversational interaction (see Gass, 1997; Gass, Mackey, & Pica, 1998; Del Pilar García Mayo & Alcón Soler, 2002 for a review of research in this area).

Long (1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1989) studied the ways learners interact with native speakers. He started his researches agreeing with Krashen's comprehensible input theory. Krashen hypothesised that language data which could be understood but with a slight effort, and which were slightly more advanced than the learner's level of understanding, fostered learning. He claimed that a type of input called 'i + 1', where the 'i' represents the current level of the learner's knowledge, and the '+1' an input which is slightly above this level, would promote language learning. Although the importance of this concept of comprehensible input was considered paramount by many researchers, and became a dominant theme in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, interactionist critics pointed to some of its insufficiencies. They doubted that mere exposure to input, even if comprehensible, could promote language learning. When reading a book, watching a TV program, or listening to a radio broadcast learners do not interact with the source of language: the communication is unidirectional. They do not have the opportunity to show that they have not understood the message, to ask for clarifications or repetitions. On the basis of these considerations Long, although accepting the comprehensible input theory, decided to study how input is made comprehensible. His researches showed that native speakers consistently modify their speech when they interact with

non-native speakers. Most native speakers seem to adjust naturally their speech to the non-native-speakers needs, in order to facilitate communication. Modified interaction involves not only linguistic simplification, but also other types of modifications.

Examples of interactional modifications are:

a) Comprehension checks - efforts by the native speakers to ensure that the non-native speaker has understood:

NS: Lessons start at 9:00 a.m. Do you understand?

b) Clarification requests - efforts by the non-native speaker to clarify something which has not been understood. They lead to further modifications by the native speaker.

NS: Could you show me your ticket, please?

NNS: My ticket?

NS: Yes

c) Self repetition or paraphrase - the native speaker or the non-native speaker repeat their sentences either partially or in their entirety.

NS: I bought some cheese yesterday when I went to the market. I bought some.

d) Other repetition - the native speaker or the non-native speaker repeat what the conversational partner has just said.

NNS: I met him this morning.

NS: Oh yeah, you met him.

e) Here-and-now topics - topics limited to the immediate environment, or to experiences the native speaker imagines the non-native speaker has had.

NS: Did you prepare this by yourself?

f) Expansions - native speakers reacts to non-native speakers' errors by correcting and expanding what they have just said.

NNS: I have read it already yesterday

NS: Oh yeah, of course you read it yesterday

g) Topic-initiating moves - more abrupt and unintentional topic shifts are accepted when native speakers interact with non-native speakers. (It seems that this is due to the fact that even if interlocutors may want to understand each other, they do not always have the time or motivation to work toward this goal. This is why topic-switching is so frequent in native speaker-non-native-speaker interaction (cf. Pica, 1987)

NNS: I arrived here first this morning

NS: Can you show me your work?

h) Shorter responses - high frequency of yes-no responses

Other linguistic adjustments typical of NS/NNS interactions include the following:

- Phonological: slower paced speech; more use of stress; pauses; more clearly enunciated; avoidance of contractions
- Morphology and Syntax: more well-formed utterances; shorter utterances; less complex utterances; few 'wh' questions
- Semantics: fewer idiomatic expressions, high average lexical frequency of nouns and verbs.

(The examples and definitions above are paraphrased from Long, 1983a, p.218-19).

It is evident from the above examples that these adjustments are similar, in certain ways, to the phenomenon of 'caretaker speech' in first language acquisition.

On the basis of his analysis Long inferred that modified interaction is necessary for language acquisition.

The model he proposed to explain the relationship between interactional modifications, comprehensible input, and language acquisition stresses the importance of conversation (interaction) in producing comprehensible input. It also implies that modification which takes place during interaction is more useful to learners than mere linguistic simplification or modification which is planned in advance (Input Modifications) (Long 1983a:214).

Other hypotheses have been made on the relationship between comprehensible input and language learning. Swain (1985, 1995),

after years of research with French immersion programmes in Canada, reached the conclusion that comprehensible input is only responsible for the acquisition of semantic competence, while ‘comprehensible output’ is the responsible for grammatical competence. Comprehensible output is that originated by the interactions of the learners, who through processes of negotiation of meaning make themselves understood and acquire at the same time the structures of the language. In other words the attempts learners make to get their message through enable them to check the validity of their hypotheses about how the language works. These attempts also help them to automatise their knowledge and to develop competence.

Several empirical studies (e.g. DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996; Izumi 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) have definitely established the importance of output for second language learning.

In recent years Swain’s theoretical orientation has moved “from viewing output solely within an information-processing framework of learning to viewing output within a sociocultural theoretical perspective of learning” (Swain & Lapkin 2002, 285). This means that output is now regarded not only as a message to be conveyed, but as a tool in cognitive activity.

##### *5. Interaction in the analysis of classroom discourse*

Pica’s research was moved by the need to find empirical support for the thesis of Long that learners’ comprehension of new input is fostered when they engage in negotiation of meaning with

their interlocutors (Pica, 1987; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, & Morgenthaler, 1989). Her initial research focused on the way contributions made by negotiation aid learners' comprehension of input during one-to-one native speaker - non-native speaker interaction. Excerpts from the data she collected showed that when non-native speakers ask their interlocutors to clarify or confirm the meaning of a message, either by direct appeal, or by repeating, with rising intonation, part of what had just been said, their receptive and expressive capacities in a second language are advanced. This happens also because these interactional moves force learners to draw more deeply into their language resources, and this manipulation of the existing language system has been shown to be beneficial to language learning.

Pica then moved on to analyse interactional features in classroom environments. It could be expected that such a social context as a language classroom, where most events (lessons, discussions, drills, dialogues etc.) are constructed through the interaction of teachers and students, should provide the best opportunities for restructuring interactional moves, i.e. confirmation and comprehension checks and clarification requests. However, research showed that these moves were significantly smaller in a classroom context than those found in native speaker and non-native speaker interaction outside the classroom. Classroom interaction seemed to be mostly made of acts when learners simply display their knowledge and skills, while teachers instruct, evaluate and monitor

learners' performance. Pica suggested that these findings could be explained by considering the teacher-student role and status relationship which are created and rule most classroom activities. First it should be remembered that a necessary precondition for interactional modification is the need interlocutors have to understand each other (Long, 1983a.). However, what usually happens during a class period is that teachers have already a clear idea of what their students are likely to say, because of the material, the tasks and activities they have prepared. In other words teachers can predict the scenario that their lesson plans will generate. Therefore such an interactional modification as topic shift is very unlikely to happen naturally in classroom discourse. Another important reason why classroom activities bring few opportunities for classroom members to restructure their interaction has to be sought in the unequal status relationship existing between learners and teachers. Learners may avoid asking teachers to clarify their sentences because they fear that their clarification requests and confirmation and comprehension checks 'will be perceived as challenges to the knowledge and professional experience of the teacher' (Pica, 1987:12). The logical consequence of this consideration is that activities which build collaboration and sharing of responsibility for the learning process among classroom members can create the right environment for interactional modifications to take place.

In light of her findings on the inadequate interactional features found in classroom environments Pica (1991, 1994) devoted her more

recent research on the study of tasks that could create the right opportunities for classrooms participants to modify and restructure their interaction. She found that an activity which requires students to exchange information forces learners to make sure they understand each other's production and work towards making themselves understood. This creates the natural context for plenty of interactional modifications to take place. The information-exchange task which resulted to be one of the most successful in promoting interaction is the 'jigsaw', where each participant holds a decisive part of the overall information, and where the contribution of everyone is essential to complete the task. The findings of her research were that the negotiation of meaning required by the structure of the task led to more accurate comprehension, and that the highest interactors were also the best comprehenders. Another important finding was that when pre-modified input alone was the only source of information comprehension was significantly worse than when unmodified input was used together with the opportunity to ask clarification questions or signal difficulty. Pica concluded by advising teachers to work toward negotiation with their students, and to design and use tasks which promote equalized interaction.

It has also been observed that through conversational interaction interlocutors' feedback may be addressed towards drawing interlocutors' attention to formal aspects of the language, in this way encouraging self-repair (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Research has shown that L2 learners' participation in negotiated interaction eases the

access to one of the conditions claimed to support language learning, namely focus on form (Long and Robinson, 1998; Schmidt and Frota, 1986).

Finally, it is interesting to consider how interaction is treated by Seedhouse (1994) who considers classroom discourse as a particular speech community discourse with specific patterns of interaction. His research shows that a successful language classroom must operate in four basic modes, each with its own aims and characteristics:

*Classroom mode 1* Real-World Target Speech community (the purpose of which is to make the learners capable of interacting with their real-world target speech community)

*Classroom mode 2* Classroom as Speech community (the purpose of which is to maximise the opportunities for interaction created by the classroom situation and the classroom community of learners)

*Classroom mode 3* Task-Oriented Speech community (in which the learners carry out a task by using language as a tool. It is interesting to observe at this regard that also in Long's (1983b.) view one of the basic features of second language classroom is that language is at the same time the object and the means of instruction)

*Classroom mode 4* Form and Accuracy Speech community  
(in which the learners learn from the teacher how to use linguistic forms and structures accurately).

6. *The role of language awareness and consciousness-raising activities in promoting language learning*

Studies have been carried out to show the advantages of raising students' habits of observation and noticing of forms and functions of a target language (Carter, Hughes & McCarthy, 1998). These studies were partly motivated by the need to respond to communicative language teaching methodology, which in focusing on the learners' use of language had seemed to understate the importance of learners' analysis and understanding of its forms and functions.

Of particular interest are the findings of research by Schmidt (1990; 1993; 1995), Ellis (1990; 1994; 1997), Fotos (1993), Sharwood-Smith (1981), Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith (1985), and Rutherford (1987), who have all investigated the merits of promoting learners' consciousness of grammatical forms. Their research shows that activities that promote conscious attention to the structures of a foreign language foster students' acquisition of these structures. Also, it has been noted how learning can be more effective if learners are given the opportunity to reflect and analyse the structures before rushing to produce them. The best task at this regard would seem to be one that first asks the learners to focus on the meaning of the structures, and then challenges them to consciously noticing their

form and functions. In this way, learners' interpretative skills are encouraged, and their efforts are awarded when linguistic patterns become clear. At the end of the task structures that were previously unknown become part of the learners' knowledge, and this thanks to their own ability and intuition.

Kuiken and Vedder (2002) have investigated the effect of interaction between ESL learners during a dictogloss task on the acquisition of the passive form. Although the quantitative analysis of their data could not demonstrate that recognition and frequency of use of the passive differ depending on the degree in which learners are encouraged to interact with each other, the qualitative analysis revealed that interaction often stimulated noticing, which in turn led to the formulation of new linguistic proposals.

### *7. Conclusions*

The analysis of the role of interaction in promoting language acquisition has demonstrated how it is important to create opportunities for interactional moves in language classrooms. Researchers have suggested activities such as information sharing 'jigsaws', which have been shown to 'force' learners to negotiate their linguistic output in order to carry out the task. One of the merits of McCarthy's model is that also a traditionally teacher-fronted, 'unidirectional' moment of language instruction - the teaching of grammar - becomes an opportunity for learners to engage in interactional moves, which ultimately lead them to understand and

acquire the structures of the language under examination. In the Interaction stage learners become responsible for their own learning, as they themselves are asked to ‘discover’ the mechanisms of the target language. Pica (1987) has shown how discussion-orientated, problem-solving activities are beneficial for language learning, together with activities that help students to focus more on the process of learning than on the product. In the Interaction and Induction stages of the ‘Three Is’ methodology learners’ awareness of the linguistic structures is raised, their noticing and analysing skills are developed, and these positive factors go hand in hand with their ‘practice’ in the language, if they perform their analysis in the target language. Language becomes at the same time the object and the means of instruction; the matter of the lesson and the medium of instruction and this is considered by Long (1983b.) one of the basic features of “good” second language classrooms.

In addition, the ‘Three Is’ is a pedagogical modelling that promotes a more equal status relationship between teacher and students. It helps to redefine teachers and students role relationship and equalize their status as classroom participants. As we have seen, Pica (1987) identifies in the different status relationship one of the reasons for the lack of interactional modifications in most examples of classroom discourse. At this regard the ‘Three Is’ methodology helps building a more favourable social and linguistic environment for second language acquisition. From a pedagogical point of view this model will prove to be beneficial for students whose styles of

participation are such that they seldom question their teacher, seek help with comprehension, speak out voluntarily, or acknowledge difficulty with understanding the target language.

The linguistic theory underling McCarthy's model is that spoken language has features of its own. The knowledge of these features is essential if learners want to acquire good speaking skills in the target language. It is difficult not to agree with McCarthy at this regard. It is a well-known fact that even students achieving very good results in studying foreign languages in their native countries find it very difficult to understand native speakers in real life situations when they arrive in the country where the language they studied is spoken. Definitely one of the reasons for this has to be found in the lack of exposure to real chunks of language. Typical dialogues included in textbooks feature a type of language which is usually measured, self-conscious, obviously pre-planned and formal, and more likely to emulate written standards. The exposure of learners to data from corpora of spoken language will improve their linguistic performance 'on site'. The analysis of how words are used in discourse will probably help them to make sense of other linguistic features of the spoken language when they meet them in interactions with native speakers. There is another advantage in the use of real chunks of language. Analysing and understanding 'authentic' discourse is very likely to raise learners' motivation, because they will feel proud of being able to discover and eventually use natural features of the target language.

As we have seen research conducted by Pica also showed how the use of unmodified input when opportunities for negotiated interaction are provided is superior to simplified, pre-modified input.

McCarthy (Carter, Hughes and McCarthy, 1998) has pointed at some possible problems that his pedagogical modelling could present for teachers and learners. With regard to the Illustration stage he is concerned with the need to present data in a way that can successfully ensure a good response in learners, i.e. raise their interest and motivation. The consideration that when analysing spoken language is better to talk of tendencies and choices brings about the concern that such notions can be unsettling to teachers and learners who are generally used to reassuring fixed grammar rules presented in reference books and coursebooks. Finally, McCarthy reflects about the way data stored in spoken language corpora should be presented to learners in a classroom setting. Do they have to be left unmodified in the raw forms in which they are collected or should they be modified for purposes of classroom learning?

Of the concerns expressed by McCarthy it is difficult not to share the one about the fact that replacing the reassuring concept of standardized, unchanging grammar rules with that of grammar tendencies and choices (albeit only in the area of spoken language) could be unsettling for some learners and teachers. Particularly non-native teachers feel constantly the threat of their non-native language competence and it is easy to understand that they always strive to arrive at some definitive conclusions about the language they may

have been studying and teaching for years. Students who are told by non-native teachers that for a certain grammatical feature there is not a fixed rule could simply start doubting their professionalism.

The ‘Three Is’ is more likely to work well with a class of adult, highly motivated learners. There is little doubt that it requires more attention and effort on the part of the learner than the PPP approach, and some students could find it too tiring, particularly in evening language classes. There is the risk that some students, who are used to traditional ways of teaching grammar, could think that teachers have found a way to be less involved in the management of the lesson, in other words want them to work more in order to be less bothered themselves.

With consideration to the level of class, this approach would probably work well with upper-intermediate learners, who have the linguistic competence to interact, in the worst case at least partially, in the target language. Its use with classes of absolute beginners would reduce significantly the merits illustrated above. In a monolingual class of beginning learners, where the teacher knows their language, the interaction stage could still be conducted in the learners’ first language, as a language awareness activity. But how is it possible to use this approach in a class where beginners speak different languages?

To conclude it seems possible to affirm that the ‘Three Is’ is a pedagogical modelling whose effectiveness can be strongly supported by current theoretical views on language learning, and that can be

successfully adopted in classes where the language level of learners allows the full exploitation of all its possibilities.

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