

# Current Principles and Concepts in the Teaching of Macroskills

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**Abstract:** Many approaches have been proposed in teaching language macroskills. Some of these approaches include communicative language teaching, task-based approach, integrated approach and sociocognitive-transformative approach. Despite the effort of improving learners' macroskills and the extensive literature available about these skills, many novice teachers and researchers remain to have limited or naive perspective of what these skills are. Moreover, many language teachers are still not aware that there are already six language macroskills as a result of the proliferation of information technology. As such, this article discusses the fundamentals of language macroskills. Specifically, the paper defines and describes the six macroskills which include both the productive skills (i.e., speaking, writing, and representing) and receptive skills (i.e., listening, reading, and viewing). Some ways on how these skills can be taught are also presented.

**Keywords:** language teaching; macroskills; ESL pedagogy; teaching principles

## 1. Introduction

The aim of any language program is to develop the different macroskills of learners. Many approaches have been proposed in teaching these macroskills. Some of these approaches are communicative language teaching, task-based approach, integrated approach (Barrot, 2014a), and sociocognitive-transformative approach (Barrot, 2014b; Barrot, 2014c; Barrot, 2015a). Despite the effort of improving learners' macroskills and the extensive literature available about these skills, many novice teachers and researchers remain to have limited or naive perspective of what these skills are. Moreover, many language teachers are still not aware that there are already six language macroskills as a result of the proliferation of information technology. As such, this article discusses the fundamentals of language macroskills. Specifically, the paper defines and describes the six macroskills which include both the productive skills (i.e., speaking, writing, and

representing) and receptive skills (i.e., listening, reading, and viewing).

## 2. Speaking

Speaking is a complex process that involves simultaneous attention to content, vocabulary, discourse, information structuring, morphosyntax, sound system, prosody, and pragmalinguistic features (Hinkel, 2006). It runs in a continuum from the immediate and most familiar to decontextualized and more formal situations. It has also been observed that formal oral communication shares similar features with written communication (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

From a sociopragmatic point of view, teaching speaking involves effective communication strategies, discourse organization and structuring, conversational routines or small talks, speech acts, and conversation formulas like forms of address (Hinkel, 2006, p. 116). Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) have suggested some

effective speaking activities in a language classroom. The first activity deemed effective is role-play in which it simulates real communication that occurs beyond classrooms. Other strategies include group discussions, using the target language outside classrooms, using learners' input, using feedback, and using authentic speeches. On top of these activities, self-evaluation would also be helpful in enhancing speech performances (Barrot, 2015b).

As regards speaking proficiency, it can be measured through fluency, comprehensibility, and accuracy. Oral fluency refers to the speaker's automaticity of oral production (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2007). Researchers in the 1990s believed that it can be achieved through engagement in communicative interactions (Hinkel, 2006) and can be enhanced through well-designed and well-planned tasks (Ellis, 2003). Another aspect of speaking proficiency is comprehensibility which refers to the ease and difficulty with which a listener understands L2 accented speech (Derwing et al., 2007). It can be adversely affected by filled pauses, hesitations, excessive and inappropriate pauses, false starts, and slow speaking rate (Derwing, Munro & Thomson, 2001). The third aspect of speaking proficiency is accuracy which relates to both grammar and pronunciation. Since grammar will be extensively discussed in the succeeding section, this part will just focus on pronunciation and its teaching.

### **3. Listening**

Usually tied up with speaking as a skill is listening. It is a complex process that involves the understanding of spoken data and involves receptive, interpretative, or constructive cognitive processes (Rost, 2005). This definition implies that listening and listening comprehension are essentially the same. Similar to reading, listening

involves both bottom-up and top-down processing rather than using these processes individually and that these processes operate simultaneously.

L2 listening has three subprocesses namely decoding, comprehension, and interpretation (Rost, 2005). Decoding refers to attending, perceiving speech, recognizing words, and parsing grammar. Comprehension deals with activation of schema, representing propositions, and logical inferencing. Interpretation refers to matching the meaning to previous expectations and evaluating discourse meanings (p. 504). Further, listening can be reciprocal or nonreciprocal. Reciprocal listening involves dialogues in which the original listener and speaker have alternating roles as source and as receiver of information. Nonreciprocal listening involves a one-way role taking as in the case of listening to monologues. Comparing the two, nonreciprocal listening appears to be more difficult to undertake (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

Other variables that influence comprehensibility are speech rate and metrical cadence. In most English varieties, 90% of content words have their stress on the first syllable, most of which are monosyllabic. Also, each pause unit in speech contains at least one prominent content item. As for speech rate, listening generally improves as speech rate is reduced to an optimum level. Normal speech rate is usually from 100 to 240 words per minute (Rost, 2005). However, other research findings revealed that more than reducing speech rate, what facilitates comprehensibility is the additional pauses at natural pause boundaries.

As regards listening pedagogy, Hinkel (2006) argued that it has shifted from a more linguistically-based approach to a more-schematic-based one which incorporates cultural constructs, discourse

clues, pragmatic norms, and topic familiarity. Current listening pedagogy also involves the enhancement of metacognitive and cognitive strategies to facilitate listening comprehension. The most widely adopted metacognitive strategies for listening include self-monitoring and evaluating comprehension process, planning for listening, and determining listening difficulties. As for cognitive strategies, they may include inferencing, elaboration, and summarizing. Note-taking and other academic listening activities are techniques appropriate for advanced listeners and can be integrated with speaking, reading, and writing.

Similar to reading, most listening materials for pedagogical purposes are often created, simplified, and graded subjectively (Lynch, 1988). This situation runs contrary to the widely accepted practice of using authentic materials in the classrooms. The concern that listening would be highly difficulty if authentic materials will be used can be addressed by using graded listening tasks (Lynch, 1988). Others proposed extensive listening approach to developing listening skills. One of them is Ridgway (2000) who advocated that when learners are exposed to ample comprehensible listening input, it will eventually lead to automaticity. However, Field (2008) countered such argument saying that there are several concerns on focusing too much on quantity without any consideration to methods for improving comprehension.

Mendelsohn (1998) has outlined teaching strategies for a strategy-based L2 listening. The first step is to make learners aware of the value of using strategies when listening. It is followed by pre-listening activities that will activate learners' schema. Then, listeners are explained on what they will listen to and why. Guided listening is also provided to allow more practice of strategies. Learners are then allowed to

practice strategies in a meaning-focused context and to process what has been listened to for note-taking and summarizing among others. Finally, learners are encouraged to self-evaluate their level of comprehension.

Related to Mendelsohn's (1998) proposal, Wilson (2003) proposed the discovery listening approach which is a response to the heavy emphasis given by most published textbooks on practicing comprehension rather than teaching learners the skills needed for an improved performance. Discovery listening allows learners to notice the differences between the original text and the text that they have reconstructed after a listening task. From this noticing of gap, the learners will try to discover the cause of their listening difficulties. The task has three phases: listening, reconstructing, and discovering. Listening allows learners to listen to a text without any note-taking. They will, then, assess their comprehension level. Finally, they will listen to the text twice with note-taking. Reconstruction phase allows learners to reconstruct the text as a group. It is followed by discovering that allows learners to compare the reconstructed text to the original text and classify the causes of errors. They will, then, assess the importance of these errors. After which, learners will listen again to the original text and assess their performance. The listening texts in a discovery-listening task are graded. Self-assessment is also utilized during the task as in the case of third phase. Wilson's (2003) proposal has semblance to the suggestion of Swain and Lapkin (2001) that a dictogloss task can be employed which will help learners focus more on form. It is done by allowing learners to listen to a short passage and reconstruct it afterwards.

#### **4. Viewing**

The dominance of visual media in our lives today has led to the inclusion of viewing in the language macroskills. It refers to perceiving, examining, interpreting, and construction meaning from visual images and is crucial to improving comprehension of print and nonprint materials.

With the inclusion of viewing in the macroskills and proliferation of multimedia technology, it is imperative that both speakers and listeners critically assess audiovisual inputs and make meaning from them (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2010). This need requires new forms of literacy: media literacy and visual literacy. Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate media and technology information that involves moving images and sound effects (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). According to De Abreu (2004), developing media literacy would help students question and critically analyze messages provided to them via media which facilitates critical viewing and thinking. In classroom setting, enhancing media literacy involves learners analyzing their own media consumption habits and identifying the author, purpose, and point of view of television and radio programs, advertisements, and films (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). Visual literacy, on the one hand, refers to the power of giving meaning to and building up similar messages for visual messages and the ability to construct meaning from images (Glorgis, Johnson, Bonomo, Colber, & Al, 1999). As Kang (2004) put it, visual literacy is as important as language and textual literacy. It, thus, obliges teachers to explore the potentials of visual and spatial instructional strategies to better facilitate the learning. One way to realize this kind of instruction is through visual organizers. Visual organizers are “visual systems of using spatial frameworks such as diagrams, maps, or charts to

organize and present structural knowledge in a content domain” (Kang, 2004, p. 58). The four general types of visual organizers include web-like organizers (spider map and semantic map), hierarchical organizers (concept map and network tree), matrix organizers (compare/contrast matrix), and linear organizers (Venn diagram, continuum, chain of events, and storyboard). These organizers are mainly used when teaching reading so that students can have better conceptual framework of their existing knowledge and new knowledge. Using visual organizers also allows learners to actively construct and interpret information. Though these two forms of literacy are at the core of contemporary culture, they are still treated superficially if not ignored in the classroom.

## **5. Reading**

Traditionally, people imagine reading as a simple process that is linear and passive. However, more recent views have established that it is a complex cognitive process of decoding written symbols. It is a “linguistic, socio-cultural, physical and cognitive activity” (CPDD, 2010, p. 31) which involves getting meaning from and putting meaning to the printed text. This definition implies that reading and reading comprehension are essentially the same meaning. Reading, in many instances, requires simultaneous application of skills and subprocesses, such as identifying author’s mood and purpose, identifying main ideas, context clues, analysis, evaluation, recognizing and assigning meaning to words, constructing meanings at sentence and discourse levels, and relating such meanings to the readers’ already existing knowledge (Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998). According to Chun and Plass (1997), two factors may have great influence on reading ability of learners: L2 language proficiency and L1 reading skills. Others are

topic interest and prior knowledge (Barry & Lazarte, 1998) as well as linguistic complexity (Barrot, 2012; Barrot, 2013; Barrot, 2015c).

Reading is an interactive and problem-solving process making meaning from the text. It possesses the following characteristics: (a) reading is a language skill that can be developed through systematic practice; (b) reading is a two-way process that involves the communication between the author and the reader; (c) reading is visual which involves the transmission of message via optic nerves and requires good eyesight; (d) reading is a productive process that has purpose whether academically, personally, or professionally; (e) reading is the foundation of good writing. Linguists assert that one of the most effective means of developing writing skills is to be a good reader. Through reading, the reader gains knowledge on lexemes, syntax, morphology, and orthography.

Reading process can be viewed from three different perspectives: bottom-up, top-down, and interactive (Chun & Plass, 1997). Bottom-up processing is data-driven which puts emphasis on textual decoding (lower-level processes) such as letter and word recognition. It assumes that reading progresses from recognizing first the lower-level units toward more complex ones through synthesis in which there is little or no interference by reader's background knowledge (Graves et al., 1998). Tsui and Fullilove (1998) contend that bottom-up processing skill is a prerequisite to good reading be it poor or good readers. Top-down processing, on the other hand, is concept-driven that puts emphasis on schema and reader interpretation. It assumes that reading starts from making meaning in the mind of the reader which will then influence the sampling of the text to substantiate or disprove the reader's hypothesis (Graves et al., 1998). In short,

the reader brings her/his background knowledge to the text. The limitation of top-down model is that it requires readers to predict meaning; consequently, only fluent readers would be able to manage such approach to reading (Eskey, 1988). Lastly, interactive processing which is both data-driven and concept-driven places emphasis on the interaction between lower-level (decoding) and higher-level (inferencing and interpretation) processing. It postulates that reading is neither exclusively top-down nor exclusively bottom-up. Rather, reading involves the interaction between linguistic knowledge and schemata (Graves et al., 1998). Most of the current L2 reading research constitutes the notion of interactive reading model and schema (Fecteau, 1999).

Another view of reading process that has emerged is the cognitive-constructivist view which emphasizes that reading involves an active search for meaning which is largely dependent on the readers' schema (Graves et al., 1998). Schema can be distinguished into content schema (knowledge about people, culture, world, and universe) and formal/textual schema (knowledge about text structure and rhetorical organization) (Barnett, 1989; Coiro & Dobler, 2007). As regards textual schema, Graves et al. (1998) stressed that most children have developed their textual schema for the organization of narratives because narratives mirror the environment they live in. Additionally, children that are being read of narratives by their parents have a considerably rich narrative text schema. Although it is proven that children have significant schema on narratives, they lack one on expository texts.

From the perspective of whole language pedagogy, reading adheres to some guiding principles (Goodman & Goodman, 2009). First, no reading will occur without comprehension. However, it should be noted that no matter how good the reader is, there

will always be misunderstanding of a text. Second, developing reading comprehension is learned through making sense of written language. Third, reading development does not follow a linear development of skills; that is, reading does not develop from part to whole but from whole to part. Finally, learners need to be exposed to authentic materials that are at their level and interests.

It is a known fact that reading involves reading strategies and reading skills. Unfortunately, many reading teachers are confused between these two concepts. Afflerbach, David Pearson, and Paris (2008, p. 368) explained that reading strategies are “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meaning of text.” Reading skills, on the other hand, refers to “automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency, and fluency and usually occur without awareness of the components or control involved”. They have also advocated for an explicit teaching of both skills and strategies. One way to teach strategy effectively is through assessment. Assessment should focus on processes involved in skills and strategies. The purpose of this assessment is to identify what learners cannot do and what they do incorrectly. Generally, strategy assessment should be formative in nature making it more informal and embedded in instruction while skill assessment should be summative.

White (1981) suggested some ways of helping teachers put reading skills to classroom setting and relate them with other macroskills. The first step is to arouse students’ interest by relating the text to their schema. The next step is to provide learners with things to search for in the text. Then, encourage students to discuss the text to one another. Finally, ask students to write about what they have read. Similarly, Nunan (1999) suggested that reading programs be

designed by determining the purpose of reading course, determining the text types and tasks for the course, determining the linguistic items to be covered, integrating tasks and reading texts to class work units, and integrating reading to other skills.

## **6. Writing**

Writing refers to the act of putting ideas in text whether print or nonprint. It is a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process” as they discover ideas and reformulate them (Zamel, 1983, p.165). Writing allows the writer to reflect on the world around her/him; it makes communication effective; it documents and captures thoughts and ideas relevant to decision making; and it provides knowledge to both the reader and the writer. Any composition we write can either be short or long. It can range from short paragraphs to long essays. With regard to the text type written by students, at elementary level, the most common types of writings are personal narratives; for secondary, it is expository with emphasis on writing about literature; and for tertiary, they expand their writing to argumentative essays (Sperling & Freedman, 2001). As regards L1-L2 writing relationship, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2008) claimed that transfer of writing skills happen in a bidirectional way; that is, from L1 to L2 and vice versa. He further concluded that writing competence can be transferred across languages. This may be the reason why in Krapels’s (1990) review, findings revealed that even advanced L2 writers consider themselves stronger when composing using their native language; that is, an increase use of L1 in writing correlates with better L2 writing especially if the topic is culture bound.

According to Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000), a well-written text has two features that facilitate the comprehensibility of a text. These are coherence and cohesion.

Coherence relates to the pragmatic features and culturally acceptable rhetorical organization, structure, and sequence. Cohesion, on the one hand, is the linguistic consequence of coherence through the use of cohesive devices making it an overt feature of a text. As regards the writing process, Rollinson (2005) has listed some insights that good writing involves revision; that writer need to have specific audience for writing; that writing involves multiple drafts with feedback in between them; that peers are useful resource of feedback at various stages of writing; that training students to peer response leads to a more quality writing; and that peer and teacher feedback act complementarily with additive value.

Currently, there are five approaches to teaching writing: product approach, process approach, genre approach, process genre approach, and post-process pedagogy. More recently, Barrot (2015d) proposed a sociocognitive-transformative approach in teaching writing which incorporates the use of technology into the writing process (Barrot, 2016). Product approach focuses on what a final piece of writing will look like and measures the product using vocabulary use, grammar, mechanics, content, and organization as criteria (Brown, 1994). The procedure includes four stages: familiarization, controlled writing, and free writing. From a teacher's perspective, it involves assigning a piece of writing, collecting it, and returning it for further revision. The concerns with using product approach is it ignores the actual process used by the students in producing a piece of writing, focuses on imitation and churning out a perfect product on the first draft, requires constant error correction that affects students' motivation, and does not prepare students for real world.

The last four approaches has placed grammar in the background in writing texts and methodology books in which grammar

checking is usually considered as post-writing process (Tribble, 1996). But the question is the role that grammar plays in the teaching and enhancing writing skills. Muncie (2002, p. 185) proposed some guidelines in incorporating grammar to writing classes. First, grammar should not defocus learners from the meaning orientation of writing pedagogy. Second, teacher feedback should not involve any grammar correction. Third, grammar correction must be directly linked to the editing stage. Fourth, grammar component should satisfy the perceived learners' needs. Finally, grammar component should involve the recycling of materials. Though content and meaning should be the utmost priority in a writing class, it is recognized as well that linguistic accuracy situates itself as an important factor in any final written output especially if linguistic inaccuracy impedes the clarity of meaning (Ashwell, 2000). Several other scholars have proposed that grammar correction be excluded from the teaching of writing. One of them is Truscott (1996) who strongly argued that grammar correction in writing classes should be abandoned because it is ineffective, has detrimental effects, and lacks merits. He defined grammar correction as correcting grammatical errors to improve students' ability to write accurately. He further asserted that the burden of proof resides on those who claim that grammar correction is beneficial. Truscott (1996) asserted that one possible reason that error correction failed is that it does not respect the order of acquisition by correcting students on grammatical forms for which they are not ready yet. The acquisition of grammatical forms is a gradual developmental process contrary to the view underpinning error correction of a sudden discovery.

These claims against the role of grammar correction in writing were challenged by Ferris (2004) by arguing that

there are insufficient studies on error correction in L2 writing. And if ever proponents of error correction claim its effectiveness, the burden of proof is on them. She further asserted that, granted that research base in L2 composition is inadequate, teachers cannot afford to wait for generalizable research findings from L2 composition researchers. It is because teachers struggle to making their learners write more effectively and learners lack progress in terms of accuracy (Ferris, 2010). In the meantime, what teachers can do is to use the existing evidence, experience, and intuitions in the teaching of writing. Despite the ample studies that compare the effectiveness of different types of error corrections, very few have compared “correction” versus “no correction” for ethical reasons. With these contentions, Ferris (2004) suggested that error treatment must be made part of L2 writing instruction particularly indirect feedback. Students should also be given opportunities to edit their own work after receiving feedback and prepare and maintain error charts for heightened awareness of their linguistic weaknesses. Finally, they should be given supplemental grammar instruction based on their needs and instruction on paragraphing and punctuation (Tsang, 1996).

## 7. Conclusion

This paper presents the current principles in teaching macroskills. Specifically, the paper defines and describes the six macroskills which include both the productive skills (i.e., speaking, writing, and representing) and receptive skills (i.e., listening, reading, and viewing). Some ways on how these skills can be taught are also presented. Language teachers in various contexts can use these concepts in their respective language classrooms for a more principle-based pedagogy. Nonetheless, the

principles espoused in this paper should be taken as suggestive more than conclusive.

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