

An Introduction to a Non-Linear, Social Action Theory of the ELT Classroom

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The primary purpose of any theory is to clarify concepts and ideas that have become, as it were, confused and entangled. Not until terms and concepts have been defined can one hope to make any progress in examining the question clearly and simply and expect the reader to share one's views.

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Book 2, Chapter 1

My colleague Fitch O'Connell has done me a great service in his article, "Is the Teacher of Literature More a Farmer or an Industrialist", (located at <http://www.hltmag.co.uk/jul05/mart02.htm>). This article, which introduced my adaptation of the theories of Carl von Clausewitz and Max Weber as applied to the ELT classroom, as well as the continuing success of the BritLit project, have provided me with the stimulus to present a shortened version of my theory which will, I think, provide a unique theoretical basis to the BritLit program and ELT in general. We are not focusing here on applied linguistics, or chemical reactions in the human brain, or Chomskyan transformational grammar, or even on critical pedagogy, but rather on the ELT classroom as a social interaction, focusing on the subjective meanings that both students and teacher associate with the complex social interaction through language which takes place there. Not that these other aspects do not have merit, but what I am attempting here is to introduce a flexible structure of theoretical concepts in which many subjects of interest in ELT could operate with a clearer relationship to one another. Perhaps what I present here is more the nature of a mixture of theory and what is known as "pre-theory", or how to look at theory. Chomsky himself has said that "linguistics is a branch of psychology". I expand that by saying that the ELT classroom is a branch of sociology, and that specifically social action theory provides us with the vantage point from which to view what takes place within this ELT socio-linguistic complexity. Within this theoretical structure there is ample room for the multitude of fascinating topics and subjects that abound in our profession today.

Introduction

I start here with four assumptions. My first is that cultural accommodation exists¹ and that a language is bound to a specific culture and values. We teach a language and we teach the values as well; they can not be separated. Not only that but the various other mediums that students have access to in English convey very specific values as well, be they film, music, the internet, or print. My second assumption is that we as education professionals are motivated by more than simply material interest (providing a service for pay), that all of us can agree that a subjective philosophy of education is necessary for a teacher. That is a philosophy that teachers themselves choose, are comfortable with and that is suitable to the nature of the ELT classroom. My third assumption is that the individual ELT teacher is the person to decide what to do in their classroom, based on that unique situation as they see it. Equipped with a practical theory and methodology the teacher can best navigate the complexity of their own ELT classroom and make the most of that social interaction building

¹ "Cultural accommodation proposes that individuals will respond in a manner that favors or accommodates the culture associated with the language of presentation. Specifically, bilingual individuals, when responding in their native language, will accommodate the culture (e.g., beliefs and values systems) associated with the native language. When responding in a secondary language, these same bilingual individuals will accommodate the culture associated with the secondary language." Quoted from Ralston, David A., *Cultural Accommodation: The Effect of Language on the Responses of Bilingual Hong Kong Chinese Managers*, available at <http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/R/David.A.Ralston-1/culaccom1995.html>; INTERNET.

social cohesion which is the path to success from this perspective. Finally, my last assumption concerns the student. The student, in most cases, wishes to learn, wishes to benefit from their time in the classroom. Students who do not wish to learn can be motivated and encouraged to become good students, which only reinforces this assumption. The basis of success is student motivation - that is the meaning they put behind their presence in class - that is social action.

For this theory, the emphasis is on non-linearity in the social system sense and social action in the sense of meaning, motivation and expectation. It is in fact the concept of non-linearity applied to social relationships that links not only Clausewitz with Weber (although neither referred to it as “non-linearity”), but both theorists with the ELT classroom. These concepts will be each explained in turn below.

How does one start? This theory starts with a non-linear model of the ELT classroom adapted from Clausewitzian strategic theory (specifically his general theory of war), his “remarkable trinity” of the irrational, chance and rational purpose, which he saw as the basis of that most complex and violent of all social interactions – war. One asks, what does the ELT classroom have to do with war? An obvious question, but not really the right question. Rather, one should consider that a model that holds for the most complex of all social interactions, that which deals with opposing wills and paradoxical logic (one does not do the obvious since one attempts to surprise and overwhelm one’s enemy) may also be applicable to far less complex social interactions where no conflict exists, where there exists agreement as to the final goal, where no violence or associated fear and hostility are present at all. The interest is not in war, but in the application of Clausewitzian theoretical concepts dealing with the complexity of social relationships in the classroom.²

My view is that Clausewitz’s general theory of war provides a “template” which can be adapted to various social interactions, and that it provides us with the conceptual tools that enable us to model social relationships and “communities” of varying complexity, from war to far less complex relationships such as the ELT classroom.³ This framework is augmented, expanded and refined by Max Weber’s social action theory which deals with the meanings that individuals put behind their actions.⁴ In this paper I will describe the overarching concept of non-linearity, two compatible models of the ELT classroom, various ideal types, four conceptual dialectical pairs, and finally the five operating principles (five F’s) that Fitch introduced in his article. As I mentioned above, what binds and connects the two theoretical perspectives (Clausewitz and Weber) is the concept of non-linearity.⁵ This entire conceptual

² The complexity of the ELT classroom is nothing new to ELT literature. For an excellent discussion of this complexity incorporating different perspectives which is very compatible with this theoretical framework see Tudor, Ian, *The Dynamics of the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp 104-131.

³ My primary source in developing the Clausewitzian elements of this theory has been Clausewitz’s magnum opus, *On War*. Refer to Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1976. Especially to Books 1, 2, 3, 6 & 8.

⁴ My primary source for Weberian social action theory is Weber’s essay “Basic Sociological Concepts” contained in Weber, Max, *The Essential Weber*, Routledge, London, 2004, pp 311-358.

⁵ The subject of non-linearity in the writings of Clausewitz and Weber could be a subject for another paper. The standard secondary source for Clausewitz and non-linearity is Beyerchen, Alan, “Clausewitz, Non-linearity and the Unpredictability of War”, *International Security*, 17:3, (Winter 2002), pp 59-90. Available at <http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/Beyerchen/CWZandNonlinearity.htm>; INTERNET. There is not much application of the concept of non-linearity to Weber, but I would argue that the complexity of the rise of modern or rational capitalism as presented in Weber’s most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, could be described as non-linear. Both theorists deal with complex social systems and interactions which can take place over long periods of time. All the characteristics of non-linearity mentioned in this paper apply.

framework provides us not only with theoretical models, but a methodology and “system” of thought in which a wide variety of additional concepts and methodologies can be compatible.

In short this approach provides a rich source for application to ELT, as in Max Weber’s philosophy of education, with his emphasis on developing critical thinking and self-empowered individuals.⁶

To start, from a theory perspective we need to think about how we conceive reality - that is reality defined as everything within our sensory perception which goes on around us. If one considers the vast amount of phenomena that goes on in our everyday lives, the vast amount of occurrences that could conceivably catch our attention, we would quickly be overwhelmed by the onrush of events. What we do is filter these events, consciously and unconsciously, decide what is worth the bother of analysing and considering, and what is not.⁷ As educators in the ELT classroom we know what we should focus on, what we should deal with, and what we should ignore. We come by this intuitively or perhaps more often, as the result of experience, or trial and error. The goal of this theory is not to tell the teacher what to do, but rather to provide the teacher with the conceptual tools to better understand what is going on and then act accordingly to what they think best given their unique classroom situation with the goal of achieving a high degree of social cohesion (varied and sustained social action) in the classroom. The theory is not a representation of reality, not a reflection of reality, but a conceptual “yardstick” with which we measure reality, compare to what we see going on around us, to help us understand, explain and predict. Furthermore, this theory adjusts this focus on reality totally to the human realm. Our focus is not technological “efficiency” or whiz-bang entertainment or “teaching to test”, but rather the student’s own goals, values, desires and motivations, along with the cultures and values linked to the English language, as well as the professionalism of the educator. The perspective moves from technique, to the human element; from a fixed goal, to a dynamic and evolving process. Technology is of course addressed, but in terms of student and teacher expectations, fears, or stimulus to social action and learning. Rather than a focus itself, technology is seen as facilitator, or possibly, conversely, a source of friction and fear. This theory works equally well in a high-tech classroom or in a tent in the forest with no electricity.

From the great mass of phenomenon and events we choose the exclusively human element, in effect what people subjectively find meaningful. Thus we are dealing with subjective goals, values, desires, emotions, and motivations. The realm of theory provides us with the conceptual tools necessary to, as Clausewitz points out, “learn to distinguish between essentials and inessentials, and fully understand the influence of human limitations”⁸, which allows us to follow the common thread present in the classroom which leads us from the beginning of our first lesson to the end of our last.

The focus for our theory is this human action, or social action, but before we proceed we need to address the nature of this complex social interaction that links the thought of Clausewitz, Weber and the ELT classroom, namely non-linearity.

This section will be followed by the introduction of Clausewitz’s two models and adaptations using them to the ELT classroom. This will then lead us to a discussion of Weber’s social action theory and the five operating principles which provide something of the “glue” or magnetic fields of attraction/repulsion between the different elements. Next, I will apply the

⁶ See Weber’s essays “The Vocation of Science” and “The Objectivity of Knowledge, both in *The Essential Weber*. The best discussion of Max Weber’s philosophy of education in the secondary literature is in my opinion Goldman, Harvey, *Politics, Death and the Devil*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1992, pp 159-224.

⁷ See “Objectivity of Knowledge”, p 380.

⁸ See *On War*, Book 8, Chapter 9, translation of the original German slightly altered by author.

theory to a specific BritLit project and to the BritLit program in general. Finally we end this paper with a conclusion that attempts to draw the various strands together.

Non-Linearity

We all know that social reality is complex, but why is it complex? Because it is non-linear.⁹ Consider these three sets of questions concerning the ELT classroom:

1. Have you ever had a lesson which was thoroughly planned for but still came out badly? That is, you were unsatisfied with the result in comparison with the amount of time and effort you put in to preparing for it? On the other hand, has a lesson which you did not plan for much ever turn out exceptionally well? That is, the satisfaction was high in comparison with the amount of time that you spent preparing for that lesson?
2. Have you ever had two lessons, but two different groups of students (same level, same book, same lesson plan) that were exactly the same? What about a lesson whose subject matter you thought the students would find fascinating, but they reacted quite the opposite, or subject matter you thought they would hate, that they really worked hard at?
3. How would you define *classroom dynamic*? Have you ever had one student who contributed more than any other to the success of a lesson? What of the opposite, one student who constantly disrupted the class? Do relations between students and between the individual student and the teacher affect the way that a course develops over the academic year? Is it important to get off to a good start at the beginning of term?

I already know the answers to these questions. I have given a longer list of such questions to various groups of teachers over the last six years and up till now no teacher has failed to answer yes or no as I had anticipated. Why is that? It is due to the fact that the ELT classroom is a non-linear system.¹⁰

The easiest way to define non-linearity is to define linearity and then consider the opposite.

The Features of Linearity are:

- Proportionality – Small inputs lead to small outputs, cause is proportional to effect.
- Additivity – The whole is equal to the sum of its parts. $2 + 2 + 2 + 2 = 8$. This feature promotes reductionism where a complicated problem is broken up into manageable pieces, analysed as constituent parts and a conclusion is reached.
- Replication- This says that the same actions, done under the same conditions, will turn out the same way. This is what makes linearity so reliable.
- Demonstrability of Cause and Effect – This provides for simple study, the cause is clearly related to the effect, that is what is happening is obvious, unambiguous; you can plan ahead based on what you know, even if it is not very much.

⁹ We define non-linearity as opposed to linearity. The terms “chaos” or “chaotic” used here refer to confusion, the usual definition, not chaos theory. The question as to whether the ELT classroom, or any social system, is both non-linear and a chaotic system is left open. A chaotic system according to chaos theory displays a deterministic structural dynamics. There has been some study by economists as to whether the market is a chaotic system, but their findings have been in my opinion inconclusive. We take on the single characteristic of the importance of initial conditions on the final result due to empirical evidence, but limit the influence of chaotic structural dynamics in our theory to that one item.

¹⁰ This view is shared by Ian Tudor, who writes in his book, *The Dynamics of the Language Classroom*, Cambridge, 2001, p 3, “In this view, language teaching is less a matter of hierarchical, top-down realisation of ideal curricular structures and methodological principle than the emergent product a very large number of local, dynamically self-organising systems.”

Society fosters and rewards linear behaviour. Without linearity, science as we know it would not be possible. Our education system organises and teaches based on it (the syllabus, the way that course books are designed, lesson plans, examinations, teacher training and evaluation). Businesses hire, fire and promote based on it. Government and private bureaucracy runs based on it. In fact the (Western) World administers and controls the various elements of our human existence based on an assumption of linearity.

The problem is that human beings act in non-linear ways. Being social creatures we operate in a highly complex social existence which displays none of the elements of linearity in any consistent fashion. To apply this to the ELT classroom consider your answers to the three sets of questions I listed above and consider these characteristics of non-linearity:

The Features of Non-Linearity

- Non-Proportionality – input and output are not proportional.
- Non-Additivity – The whole is not quantitatively equal to the parts.
- Non-Replication – The same actions repeated under the same conditions can lead to very different results. Non-linear dynamics (this trait) are arbitrarily sensitive to tiny changes in initial conditions, that is the initial conditions can greatly effect how the system develops over time.
- No Demonstrability of Cause and Effect – There are simply too many unknowns. We can have a positive or negative effect without being able to recognise the cause, not to mention the fact that the effect might not be what we expect either.

Non-linearity describes what we experience every day in the ELT classroom. We can have a great lesson that we did little planning for, or a lousy lesson that we worked on for hours. One student can enhance or disrupt the entire class and change the entire dynamic. Any student can be active and interested one lesson and lazy and uninterested the next. No two lessons are ever the same and sometimes we are surprised by the reaction of our students to a subject.

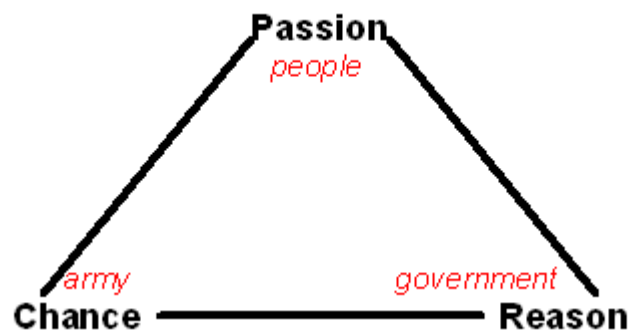
Given that we are dealing with this complex social interaction, the ELT classroom, the usefulness of a flexible theory that allows for non-linearity becomes apparent. Let's start with two models.

Clausewitzian Models

We begin with the “remarkable trinity” of Clausewitz. Clausewitz took years to develop this concept and started with a series of definitions as to what war was: War is a duel; war is like a game of cards; war is imposing our will on our enemy. Clausewitz was dealing with opposing wills, at least two sides that interact over time in conflicting ways which include violence and extreme passion. According to his initial theory all wars should have been wars of total victory for one side or the other, but that was not the case. History showed him that most wars were limited affairs which ended not in the total defeat of one side, but in negotiation, that is a compromise or the aggressor simply giving up. Restraining the fundamental fury of war were human elements, emotions and rational calculation, not to mention the role of chance. Clausewitz's final definition of war reflected this conclusion. Thus we have the original trinity of irrational passion, chance and subordination to a rational goal (reason) which constitute the interacting forces. In addition, we have the material elements which have loose affinities to the elements of the trinity: The people (material element) to passion, the military to chance, and the state (or political community) to the subordination to reason. It is important to note that for Clausewitz, this moral trinity is the actual trinity describing what all wars have in common, while the material elements act more

to illustrate the moral elements and illustrate what makes each war unique. This reflects the complex nature of war.¹¹

Figure 1 – Clausewitz’s Trinity of War



Our social interaction of the ELT classroom is much less complex. We start with a slightly modified original trinity of “irrational” social action, chance, and subordination to a rational goal (learning English), which constitute our moral elements and then go to the material elements of student, language and teacher. But here we make a significant change, we reverse the order of importance, the material elements of student, language and teacher become our main trinity with the moral elements becoming the secondary trinity/elements. This allows us to focus on the moral by way of the material elements. This is possible due to the fact that our material elements are stable enough in each interaction to be seen as possessing commonality and thus are dealing with a much more stable social system which is not operating in opposition, or in an element of violence, enmity, and danger, or utilising paradoxical logic. In fact as we all know should there be opposition between the goals of the two human elements, or hostility, or even violence (between teacher and student, or between students) the whole system (the purpose and existence of being a classroom) breaks down. It is important that these three elements (or two pairs of three elements – material and moral) be taken as an interacting dynamic whole, or gestalt.¹² As Clausewitz points out:

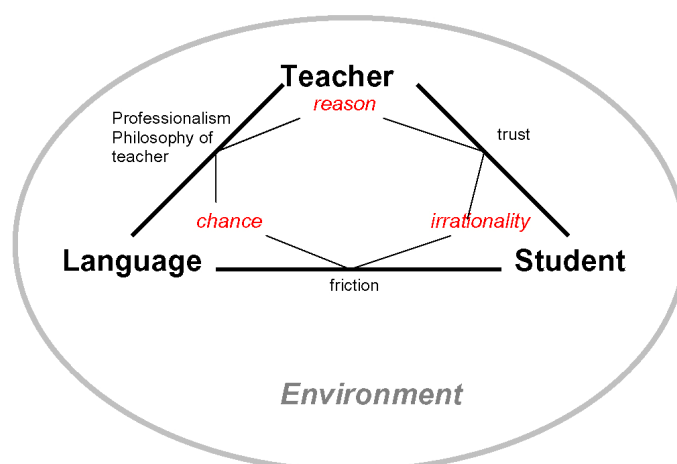
These three tendencies are like three different codes of law, deep-rooted in their subject and yet variable to their relationship to one another. A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless. Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.¹³

¹¹ Concerning his trinity, Clausewitz writes, “War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical [also translated as “remarkable”] trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; and the third the government.” See *On War*, Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 28.

¹² Concerning the characteristics of the whole or gestalt, Clausewitz writes, “The effects of physical and psychological factors form an organic whole, which, unlike a metal alloy, is inseparable by chemical processes. In formulating any rule concerning physical factors, the theorist must bear in mind the part that moral factors may play in it; otherwise he may be misled into making categorical statements that will be too timid and restricted, or else too sweeping and dogmatic.” See *On War*, Book 3, Chapter 3. And “in war, more than anywhere else, it is the whole that governs all the parts, stamps them with its character, and alters them radically”. See *On War*, Book 6, Chapter 26.

¹³ See *On War*, Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 28.

Figure 2 – Guerra’s Adaptation of Clausewitz’s model for the ELT classroom



The remarkable trinity adapted to the ELT classroom is our first model.

Notice too that we have introduced three additional elements – trust, friction and professionalism into our trinity. These are three of the operating principles that will be discussed below. They are placed here to provide an example of how the principles provide connecting fields of attraction which provides more complexity to the overall model. One common criticism of Clausewitz’s model is that it does not take into consideration technology, but this can be solved in our case by simply imagining a circle drawn around our remarkable trinity labelled "environment".¹⁴ This environment would equally effect both material and moral elements and could range from a high-tech classroom to an open field with students sitting around a teacher on the grass. The point is that technology for our purposes is always conceived in terms of our social system/environment. Also linking teacher with reason, student with irrationality, and language with chance does not imply any fixed relationship, let alone value judgement. Rather we indicate here simply an affinity between the moral and material elements. The teacher uses reason to teach. The student can get frustrated, or spend more time speaking with his fellow students then following the lesson, thus acting “irrationally” from the perspective of his purpose for being in class. Finally the language operates within the bounds of chance – including how it is understood, accepted, used and the variety of situations the student will use the language in question. This does not preclude matching the moral and material elements in different ways.

In the Clausewitz quote above, he provides us with an actual model illustrating this remarkable trinity: a magnet suspended above three other equal distant magnets mentioned is a random oscillating pendulum, a classic model of a non-linear system.

¹⁴ See Handel, Michael I., *Masters of War* 3rd Edition, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2001, page 110.



Figure 3: Random Oscillating Magnetic Pendulum

It should be noted that this metaphor actually illustrates two different points. “Reality” would be the upper magnet entering and leaving the three fields of attraction of the three magnets below eventually stopping when the energy has become exhausted (the lesson ends). Theory on the other hand would be “suspended” or floating above the interaction keeping the three lower elements in constant balance. Thus the model shows reality as movement and theory as an unreal concept which is nevertheless linked to and very useful in understanding the reality.

Here we present our ideal types of student, language and teacher, which form the three elements of our model:

The Student

- The student is primarily learning English as a means to an end, that is as a tool in his or her own professional development. This does not reject other motivations (see value-rational, traditional or affectual below), but puts this all-important motivation in a modern Western (or assimilated cultural) context.¹⁵ At the same time, we understand that the student will respond to those other value motivations as well, mating as it does language learning with a better understanding of British (or other English-speaking) culture(s), respect for one’s own traditions and culture and (hopefully) increased tolerance/openness to new ideas and ways of doing things.
- The student is an active participant in his or her learning process, not a passive element. The student enters into a dialogue with the teacher and other students which in turn influences the instruction.
- The student brings to the classroom all the learning experiences/personal history present up to that point which affect their attitudes towards ELT, this would include of course values, interests, customs, habits, the full spectrum of basis for human action.
- The student operates in a resistant medium since using English in a new classroom situation and with new grammar, or vocabulary or having to understand and describe new processes will always require sustained, focused effort.
- Thus it is the motivation of the student which most influences his or her ultimate success.
- Under this element we can also include social relations among students participating/interacting within the same classroom, and the “classroom dynamic” of student – student, which so often depends on how well students get along with one another. This is tied with social cohesion.
- Finally, the student is being exposed to different cultures and values through the language and is being presented with value choices, whether he or she is aware of this process or not. Recall we assume that cultural accommodation does exist.

¹⁵ There is also a methodological reason for emphasising this instrumental motivation, since it provides us with a clear example of causal explanation. See “Basic Sociological Concepts”, p 319.

The Language

- The English language is a separate element from both student and teacher.
- English is a linguistic system, which the teacher does not “possess” any more than the student, initially.
- English is a means of doing things, of self-expression; and is fundamentally connected to the cultures and values which it represents. The language is not culture- or value-free, nor can it be made so. It is this inherent connection with cultures and values that makes foreign language teaching inherently more complex from a social action perspective than the teaching of most other subjects in the student’s native language.
- English is a struggle for the student to master, for the teacher to explain effectively, and perhaps at times the student struggles with the teacher if the teacher senses that motivation is lacking.
- English is seen as a "cultural good" (object of value) by both teacher and student.
- This ideal type is expanded significantly by the five operating principles.

The Teacher

- The teacher is an authority figure (traditional social action – see below), negotiator and facilitator among other things. He or she *manages the pit crew* so to speak, keeps the race or rather interaction functioning.
- The teacher brings to the classroom (as does the student) their personalised history, that is attitudes toward teaching, which include of course subjective values, interests, customs, habits, the full spectrum of basis for human action.
- The teacher’s task is doubly difficult since it is primarily his or her responsibility to deal with friction (see below) in the classroom.
- Thus the teacher has various struggles going on simultaneously—the facilitating of the language being learned, dealing with a complex, non-linear social interaction, as well as keeping friction under control.
- Due to the level of complexity present, a high level of professionalism is demanded of the teacher to achieve success. The definition of professionalism is left to the individual teacher, but is partially determined by the social nature of the individual ELT classroom.
- Given the dynamics and non-linearity of the system in which the teacher operates, many paths to success are possible, as are the potentials for failure, experimentation and knowledge of the students’ particular abilities and/or needs is particularly necessary.
- This approach sees the teacher as having a responsibility as to how the medium of English is presented and taken in by the student. This requires the teacher develop a critical approach to English language materials, especially authentic materials, be they presented in course books, literature or news reports. The student should be able to analyze for themselves the fluid distinction between information and propaganda, to be able to reflect and discern and not simply totally accept or reject what they are presented with. This is very much in line with Jacques Ellul’s second stage of literacy.¹⁶

What of linearity though? It exists in the ELT classroom as well. One cannot operate in a non-linear system in a non-linear way constantly, since that would cause the system to lose any sense of control or focus, at least to most of the participants. Here social action comes in, since our students come to the classroom with certain expectations as to classroom management, materials used and the behaviour of the teacher.¹⁷ As my colleague Fitch

¹⁶ See Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, Vintage, New York, 1965 ,pages 108-109.

¹⁷ As Weber writes, “The interpretation of action has to acknowledge a fundamental and important fact: that the *conceptions* associated with a collective construct [such as the classroom] are related to things that real people think of as both positively and normatively existent. Their action is *oriented* in

mentioned to me on one occasion, “one does not answer chaos with anarchy!” So we need to have a strong linear element which snatches us back from the jaws of total chaos, to which unrestrained non-linearity can lead us. Clausewitz, not surprisingly, provides an answer in one of the three dialectics¹⁸ that he uses throughout *On War*.¹⁹

The dialectic in question is an oscillating dialectic that moves between two poles (in dialectical terms – thesis and anti-thesis). Picture the ELT classroom as a boat on a river. One bank being the non-linear side which is full of rocks and deep places, whirlpools, crocodiles even; and the opposite bank, the linear side which is straight, not too deep, well-known and safe. One could simply keep very close to the safe or linear side, but your boat would be making the same passage that your passengers (students) have made many times before. They are liable to lose interest, fall asleep, or even mutiny, which defeats your whole purpose. Given the nature of the ELT classroom, the pilot (teacher) needs to head for the non-linear dangers, but then steer back to the safety of the linear bank should things get out of hand. There will be a constant oscillation between non-linear upheaval and linear control, between experimentation and playing it safe. Literature by its very nature offers many non-linear possibilities, as Fitch has pointed out, but the calming effect of linear follow-up offers its own advantages as well.

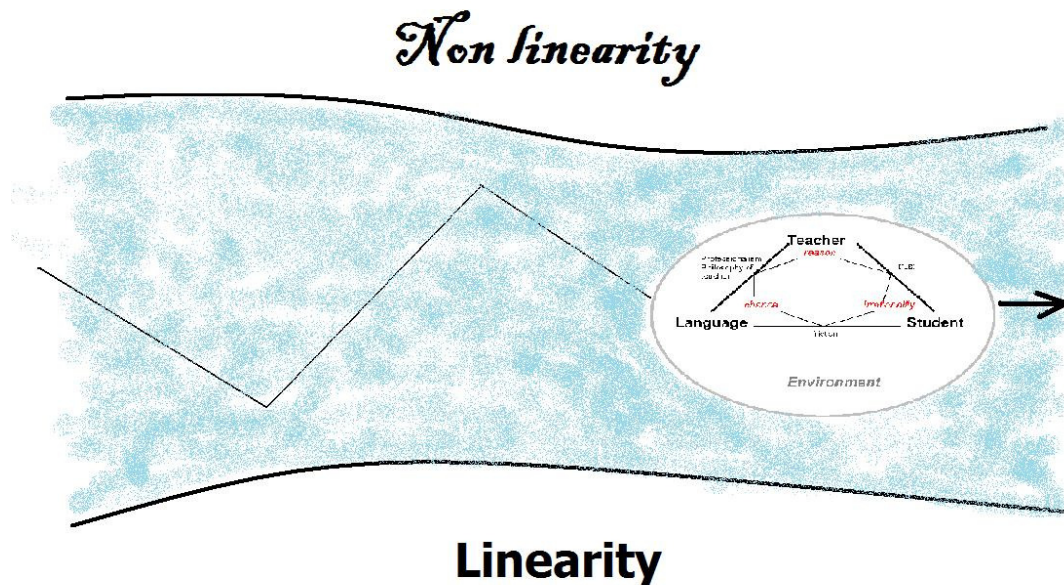


Figure 4

Looked at another way, our two banks are two opposing ideal types (see below). The linear ideal type of the classroom on the one hand is essentially the lesson as predicted and planned in our lesson plan, preceding without friction from one phase to the next, the elements of student, language and teacher reacting totally as planned. The non-linear ideal type on the

accordance with such conceptions, and they have powerful, indeed often overwhelming, causal significance for the type and course of action on the part of real people. This is especially true of conceptions relating to what should or should not exist." See "Basic Sociological Concepts", p 321.

¹⁸ The term dialectic can be confusing. Here we mean pairs of antinomical concepts or ideal types. It is also important to stress that we are NOT referring to the dialectic associated with Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel of *thesis - anti-thesis – synthesis*, but dialectics that retain the tension between the two component parts, that is there is no “final” resolution or *synthesis*.

¹⁹ The best description of the three types of dialectic used by Clausewitz in *On War* is Hartmann, Uwe, *Carl von Clausewitz – Erkenntnis, Bildung, Generalstabsausbildung*, Olzog Verlag, München, 1998, pp 122-130.

other hand would be totally spontaneous and continuous eruptions between the three elements of student, language and teacher unrestrained by lesson plans, culture, friction, history, environmental effects, or anything else. To a theoretical observer this would appear as something similar to total chaos, but theoretically, according to our ideal type, learning would be taking place. This non-linear ideal type is best illustrated once again by way of a random oscillating pendulum (see Figure 3 above).

By combining our two models we come up with a very good metaphor for the entire theory which is our remarkable trinity as a boat navigating a river (see Figure 4) with linearity and non-linearity as the two opposite banks. As time goes on, our ELT classroom “boat” moves back and forth (oscillates) from linear stability to non-linear instability over time.

This complex social interaction can also be conceived as a fractal (see figure 5).

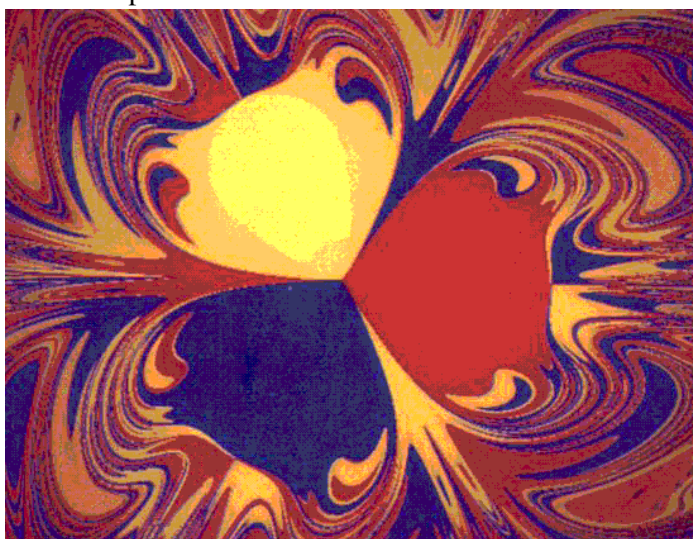


Figure 5
As can be seen the elements are in constant motion and blending with each other while retaining their individual identities.

In reality, neither ideal type exists in its pure form, just as our boat never touches one bank or the other, but always stays on the river, oscillating between the two ideal types (the two river banks).

Clausewitz does well in dealing with the non-linearity of the social interaction in the classroom, but what of the individual student? What of the emphasis on student expectations, values, motivations and goals we mentioned before? What of the complexity of the moral elements to our theory? Enter Weberian social action theory.²⁰

What Weberian social action theory does is provide us with a framework of ideal types with which to analyse our social reality in the ELT classroom in terms of individual subjective motivations, meanings and values. By purposefully addressing a range of motivations and values, we strengthen the constantly evolving social relationship of the classroom and satisfy student needs at various levels. The goal therefore is to address as many types of social action possible building social cohesion within the class, that shared goal of which is

²⁰ Clausewitz admits that his theoretical treatment of the moral factor is limited, although it forms a fundamental element of his theory – “[the moral factor has been treated] in an incomplete and impressionistic manner, content to have pointed out its general importance and to have indicated the spirit in which the arguments of this book are conceived”. See *On War*, Book 3 Chapter 3. While attending the recent Clausewitz Conference held at Oxford University in March 2005, I spoke with several of the participants about this connection between Clausewitz and Max Weber, stating openly that in my view Weber’s social action theory provides much of a theoretical base to Clausewitz’s “impressionism”. This view was widely accepted and the affinities between Clausewitz and Weber thought seemingly obvious.

learning/mastering the language and creating an inter-subjective cultural good shared by all present.

Both Clausewitz and Weber utilise what is known in strategic and social theory as the “ideal type”.²¹ The ideal type is not an ideal. It is not even reality. It is rather heightened, extremely refined elements which exist in reality, but not to the refined degree that they do in our concept of the ideal type. Ideal types for us constitute “yardsticks” against which we measure and compare reality. As Weber indicates, “[Ideal types are] formed by a one-sided *accentuation* [Weber’s emphasis] of one or *several* perspectives and through the synthesis of a variety of diffuse, discrete, *individual* phenomena, present sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes not at all; subsumed by such one-sided, emphatic viewpoints so that they form a uniform construction in *thought*. In its conceptual purity this construction can never be found in reality, it is a *utopia*.”²²

The classic line to illustrate the ideal type is that “you can have an ideal type church, bar or bordello”. All these are products of subjective attempts to define a useful conceptual tool. The more specific and refined the characteristics of the ideal type the more useful it is in comparing what one sees in reality. For instance I would define my own ideal type bar as the following: At least five different types of good beer on tap, plenty of comfortable sitting room, a long, dark hard-wood bar with lots of various liquors on shelves behind the bar, good food, reasonable prices, attractive bar maids, nice big windows facing a busy street and long opening hours. Now this would be an ideal type for a bar in general, but we could also develop our own ideal types for specific types of bars – sports, singles, gay – which would require modifications/additions to the general ideal type.

The more specific my characteristics, the better they are in comparing my ideal type with what I find in reality and noting the differences. Also by listing my subjectively-chosen characteristics, my audience can judge for themselves how useful my ideal type is for their own comparisons. Perhaps not so surprisingly, provided the cultural differences are not too great depending on the subject, you may find that many agree with your stated characteristics.

The ideal types we are dealing with are the three elements of Student, Language and Teacher that make up our trinity, the ideal types of linearity and non-linearity in the ELT classroom (as in our two poles or river banks), and the four types of social action discussed below. All these ideal types together comprise the ELT classroom as a “whole”, with the 5 F’s described below providing the fields of attraction/tension which provide a theoretical cohesion to the various elements and ideal types.

Social Action Theory

For Weber “action” is behaviour invested with meaning. “Social action” is action oriented to others or to an “order”.²³ Action that has no subjective meaning is simply behaviour or an event. The concept includes also omission and resignation, as Weber writes:

Social action (including refraining from action, or acquiescence to some situation) can be oriented to the past, present or future anticipated behaviour of others. The

²¹ For Clausewitz’s use of ideal types see Handel, Michael, *Masters of War*, Frank Cass, London, 2001, pp 327-344. For Weber’s see “Basic Sociological Concepts”, pp 325-26 and, in the secondary literature, Mommson, Wolfgang, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1989, pp 121-132.

²² See “The Objectivity of Knowledge, in *The Essential Weber*, pp 387-88.

²³ “Order” here can refer to commands, accepted norms of behaviour, or what Weber describes as “constellations of interests” referring to group formation on the basis of material and ideal interests that a group of individuals have in common. See Bendix, Reinhard, *Max Weber, An Intellectual Portrait*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1977, p 287.

others can be individual and familiar, or an indefinite number of unfamiliar people ('money', for example, signifies an exchange good which the actor accepts in exchange because his action is oriented to the expectation that numerous others, be they unknown and of indeterminate number, will for their part be prepared in future to accept in exchange).²⁴

The four ideal types of social action are: instrumental rationality, value rationality, affective (emotional), and traditional. Instrumental rationality is "means to an end" rational action, that is action that one does to achieve a specific goal. A student learns English in order to assist them in their studies, get a better job, pass an examination or achieve an academic qualification. Value rationality is more complex and has to "fulfil three conditions: (1) there has to be a conscious belief in a value; (2) there has to be planning for the realization of this value; and (3) the behaviour must be carried out regardless of the prospect of success".²⁵ An example of value rationality in the ELT classroom would be the student who learns English simply for the interest in foreign languages in general, or in British or American culture, or due to a tradition of learning in their family. The emphasis is on the process, not on the result.²⁶ Value rationality is of particular interest for us as will be pointed out below. Affectual social action is that determined by emotions, and is distinct from value rationality in that there is little or no planning involved. Gratification is expected immediately and when this is withheld an emotional response is the usual result. In the classroom this would include taking a course because friends or romantic interests are present. Consider in this instance the disappointment of some students when they realize a friend or romantic interest is not present that day in class, this disappointment is immediate, but can be compensated with other forms of social action. The final ideal type listed is traditional social action, which is also important to us since it is the initial and many times primary social action present between student and teacher. Traditional action includes obeying orders considered legitimate. These would also include family influences, such as the parents' influence on the student's decision to learn English.

Most social action in the classroom does not fit neatly into one ideal type - that is not their function, since as Weber points out, they are a *utopia*. Rather, almost all social actions are a mixture of the different types. Also action that is not oriented towards others is not social action, for instance daydreaming (which luckily does not interest us in any case). Many everyday things we do are also devoid of meaning simply because we have become conditioned to perform them, that is we do them unconsciously, automatically. Do you ever lock the door when leaving home and then five steps away from your door wonder if you had in fact locked it? Automatic, unthinking or conditioned behaviour is not social action. In addition, simple imitation of others (Weber uses the example of people opening up their umbrellas in the street at the same time in anticipation of rain), or the results of various forms of conditioning, including propaganda, are considered "unstable" and not social action.²⁷

Notice that the emphasis is on the individual, not the group. We are dealing with each individual student as a single actor with his or her own motivations, values and social action orientations. What is important to remember for the limitations of this article is that Weberian social action theory provides us with the systemic framework to conceptualise this complex group of individuals interacting within our ELT social system. Going beyond these initial definitions I would discuss expectations, social relationships, the element of authority, different types of regularities, social selection, struggle, and the formation of a community,

²⁴ See "Basic Sociological Concepts", p 327.

²⁵ Swedberg, Richard, *The Max Weber Dictionary*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005, pp 246-47.

²⁶ My own view is that Task-based Teaching appeals very well to value rationality. See Willis, Dave and Willis, Jane, *Doing Task-based Teaching*, Oxford, 2007, page 1.

²⁷ See "Basic Sociological Concepts", pp 328-29.

that is social cohesion. Here I just mention them in passing to indicate the richness of Weber's theory and the connection between social action and our goal of establishing/maintaining and expanding social cohesion within the classroom.

Let us now reflect for a moment on instrumental social action. This is the primary emphasis in ELT today. We wish to appeal to the student's instrumental reason for learning English by promoting a linear curriculum that allows them to pass a test. In addition to passing the test, the most obvious way to measure instrumental rationality is measured in terms of monetary return for the initial investment, or in other words, "bang for the buck (or Pound or Euro)". If instrumental rationality is the main orientation, then the student will shop around for the best price and change schools should the price be lower. Also if the education is state-sponsored, that is available to all, the tendency from this perspective will be to see it as of lower value since it "didn't cost anything". Weber tells us, however, that an emphasis on instrumental rationality is unstable, since this type of social action is often "powerless" in comparison to traditional and value rational social action.²⁸ What is necessary in order to establish a stable social system is to appeal to all four types of social action, especially value rational, in order to promote system stability and longevity. By putting more emphasis on *the process*, not only on the final result or on "jazzing up" the technique of achieving that result, we provide the stimulus to value rationality (as well as traditional and affectual action) which can aid the student in countless ways.²⁹

Weber has a warning here as well which I will add: From a purely instrumental rational perspective the other forms of social action appear to be "irrational", so there exists a tension in social action between the instrumental rational action and the other three.³⁰ An example of this would be a person who insists on buying their produce from a local shop where it costs more and may not look as presentable as from a supermarket, but persists due to habit (traditional), they like the person who runs the shop (affectual) or they believe that small businesses should be supported (value rational). One last comment in connection with instrumental rationality is important for us to consider. There is a reciprocal effect (or feedback, see below) between instrumental rationality and cultural accommodation, that is the instrumental rational values associated with English are transferred to the student and reinforced through the language.³¹ This is indicated also by the fact that economists lead in studying the phenomenon of cultural accommodation.

To make the distinctions between the different types of social action, another Weberian concept, that of value spheres is helpful. Weber defines culture as the domain of values and traditions - that slice of perceived reality that we select to recognise it as "meaningful" for whatever reason. Coming from this perspective of meaning we can then divide culture into various value "spheres" which each provide subjective meaning to life. Traditionally in

²⁸ See Kalberg, Stephen, *Max Weber's Comparative Historical Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, pp 62-64.

²⁹ An example of an institution which does this very well is British Council Porto. Student enrolment is high even in times of economic recession because the students and particularly the parents of the students consider studying at British Council to be worth the cost, do not look at it in terms of instrumental rationality, but more in more in terms of value rationality. One could add here the facts that many parents were also students of the institution, the common habit of paying for tutoring in addition to state schooling (traditional) and many students develop long-term friendships (affectual). I have heard teachers from other schools with declining enrolment comment on this phenomenon in wonder.

³⁰ See "Basic Sociological Concepts", page 331.

³¹ "It follows from this that instrumentally oriented action will always favour adaptation to given social conditions, rather than challenging them. As Weber puts it himself, instrumental-rational action always results in a 'deliberate adaptation of given situations in terms of self-interest'." Mommsen, Wolfgang J., *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, page 152.

Weberian sociology these have included the intellectual, aesthetic, erotic, spiritual, familial, political, economic, legal, feminist and other value spheres. These spheres are once again ideal types, since in reality value motivation can be highly complex. Still making these distinctions allows us to apply theory to practice, allowing the yardstick of theory to aid us in understanding the complexity of reality. Value spheres help us to do this as well. The value sphere of authority/domination is connected with traditional social action, whereas affectual is connected with familial, or even the erotic (as in erotic love). Instrumental rationality is closely connected with the economic value sphere in Western societies, whereas the remaining spheres listed above are connected with value rationality.

Operating Principles

The last element of my theory that I would like to describe are the operating principles, which act as connecting elements integrating our two models (the “river” and the remarkable trinity) with social action theory. My five F’s of feedback, friction, fluidity, framework and fellow students have been described as “restraining factors”. They are that, in that they do provide the human element which restrains our non-linear and linear ideal types from becoming the equivalent of perpetual motion machines. These five F’s which I refer to as “operating principles”, more importantly provide the connections between the different elements of the theory. They are the magnetic fields, so to speak, that keep the various elements together, that provide the constant tensions that keep the entire system socially dynamic and constantly in flux.

The three elements or ideal types of student, teacher and language interact to some degree according to these five operating principles. Once again, consider them as the interlocking fields of attraction/repulsion that cause motion between the three elements of our trinity and “river” models.

Our use of the term “principles” and not “laws” is based on the distinction between the two made by Clausewitz.³²

The principles introduced here are not the end of our research, but a beginning. Nor will they be necessarily applicable permanently, but can change and evolve over time. Finally we have to remember that our own subjectivity is involved as well. As Weber writes, “Knowledge of social laws is not knowledge of social reality, but instead just one of the means which we might use to attain such knowledge; and no knowledge of *cultural* processes can be conceived separately from the *meaning* which the consistently individual shaping of life’s reality has for us in respect of *specific* individual relationships. No law will tell us in *what* sense and in which relationship this is the case, since this is determined by those evaluative ideas through which we perceive culture in any one instance.”³³ In other words, the best theoretical system in the world can still fall short due to our own subjective limitations and bias. These restrictions and considerations refer to all the ideal types we have introduced as well as the operating principles which follow.

With these characteristics and limitations in mind, let us introduce the five F’s, which is how these operating principles are organised. Each F can consist of more than one principle which

³² As Clausewitz writes, “*Principle* is also a law for action, but not in its *formal, definitive meaning*; it represents only the spirit and the sense of the law: in cases where the diversity of the real world cannot be contained within the rigid form of law, the application of principle allows for a greater latitude of judgement. Cases to which principles cannot be applied must be settled by judgement. . . . A principle is *objective* if it rests on objective truth and is therefore equally valid for all; it is *subjective* and is generally called a maxim if subjective considerations enter into it.” See *On War*, Book Two, Chapter Four.

³³ See “The Objectivity of Knowledge” in *The Essential Weber*, p. 380.

have a common characteristic as encompassed by the “F-word”. For instance, the third F, Fluidity, has been chosen more for the metaphorical images it brings to mind, which the different principles in that group share. These principles apply to the theoretical system as a whole, but not to every individual ELT situation. A class of only one student would not have to consider the presence of other students, the fifth F, for example. Principles can also represent interactions that form dynamics of action. This list does not attempt to exhaust the possibilities of principles applying to the ELT classroom within this theoretical system and should be considered more a preliminary list.

Why begin with feedback followed by friction and only then with fluidity, framework and fellow students? We start with feedback since it is not the most obvious principle, but the one that provides us with social “motion” - motion which can be retarded by friction (both inside the classroom and in society in general). Fluidity then describes the motion within the classroom. Framework and Fellow students are the most obvious to teachers, which is why they are last.

1st F- Feedback

- Think of feedback as the response to an action. Feedback concerns the relationship between means and ends.³⁴ The original aim of a lesson can become modified during the course of a lesson, as can more likely the plan for the lesson.
- In a complex system like the ELT classroom we will not have simply an action followed by a reaction, but an action followed by a whole series of reactions which will then cause other reactions and so forth, and they behave interactively and not additively, as they would if they were operating in a linear system. Remember Clausewitz’s model of the three magnets with the fourth suspended overhead.
- Feedback for us provides the dynamic force which drives the social interaction between student, language and teacher, while on a much larger scale feedback drives the social processes of “progress”.
- More specifically, feedback is also Paulo Freire’s concept of “dialogic”, that is the dialogue between student and teacher, even to the point of temporary changing of roles, which influences lesson content.³⁵
- Stability in non-linear systems is often determined by the presence of positive or negative feedback. Negative feedback retards changes in the system while positive feedback reinforces changes. Without negative feedback there would be no stability in the system and without positive feedback there would be no change.
- “Positive feedback effect” is something else we must consider under this operating principle. This is when we misread a situation (recall that “chance” is one of our main moral elements) and our follow-on observations reinforce that initial mistake, strengthen our initial assumptions which then influence more observations and more reinforcement of our false assumptions. The result is that we “hear what we want to hear and disregard the rest”, with the feeling that we are in control of a situation when in fact we are misreading it completely and on the verge of system collapse.
- So feedback covers a lot of ground: From social processes encompassing the entire human world, always subject to chance, all the way down to social action between individuals. For the Teacher, feedback is both friend and foe. We want to have just enough positive feedback to produce necessary change, but not too much as to drive the system into chaos. Also we must be very wary that our observations are in fact as accurate as we think they are. In non-linear terminology, we want “to operate on the edge of chaos”, that is have a dynamic system, open to constant change but not dissolving into anarchy.

³⁴ This principle is based on Clausewitz. See Smith, Hugh, *On Clausewitz*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2005, page 106.

³⁵ See Freire, Paulo, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Continuum, New York, 1973, page 46.

2nd F – Friction is constant.

- Friction is a complex Clausewitzian concept which includes potential chronic problems such as student or teacher motivation, personal hostility, fatigue and illness.
- It also includes misunderstood instructions, any cultural misunderstanding, distractions such as cell phones ringing in class, disruptive students, loud outside noises, equipment not working properly, in all very much tied to chance.
- Friction can also be cultural and thus more difficult to identify and deal with. Since English is intimately connected with specific cultures and values, resistance to these characteristics could effect learning the language.
- Thus friction can include anything that can go wrong in the classroom, anything that can slow down or even stop the interaction is defined as friction. This last point brings up another consideration, which is that friction can be used to slow down change in the system, or can be used in individual cases to keep some students from getting too far ahead of other, slower students. Not all friction in the classroom is negative from the teacher's perspective.
- Friction for Clausewitz is what “distinguishes real war from war on paper”.³⁶ For us it is (along with chance) what separates what actually happens in the ELT classroom from what we plan to do according to our minutely planned and rationalised lesson plans at the linear level or even our ideal typical constructs of the non-linear interacting with the linear.
- Friction also exists within organisations, making them slow to adapt to new situations, and/or adverse to trying new ideas. The larger the organisation (or school or teaching institution) the more likely the effects of friction.
- Seen in another way, the more complex the system of interactions the more that can potentially go wrong, the more friction plays a role. Advanced technology is highly prone to friction and requires a constant fallback solution should it not perform. The more complex the technology, the more that can go wrong, the more its failure causes friction within the whole course of the lesson.
- The student also experiences friction in learning English, which is as Clausewitz describes, like operating in “a resistant medium”, or like moving about in water. What is simple in the student's native language is by nature more difficult to achieve in English, just as moving on land is simpler than moving in water.
- Friction can be a source of (non-)linear positive or negative feedback effect. Friction can lead to student or teacher frustration, which leads to more friction, which can lead to the system breaking down completely (due to non-linear causes). Or the teacher can inject obstacles, which act as friction for individual students who are at any moment outpacing their classmates, thus allowing for the slower students to catch up, and the lesson to resume at a steady pace (linear). In general we define friction as the inhibiting causes behind things that go wrong, but it does also have certain helpful applications.

3rd F- The ELT environment is Fluid.

- The classroom is fluid as in ever-changing, which is connected closely with feedback.
- The classroom is fluid as in subject to uncertainty and chance since the teacher is never operating with complete information.
- Much of the teacher's success rests on developing trust which acts as a sort of “lubricant” to offset friction. Trust is also necessary for social cohesion and is covered in the section on framework below.
- The classroom is fluid as in connected, just as water can be siphoned through a hose, the water molecules pulling each other in the direction of least resistance, so the ELT

³⁶ See *On War*, Book 1, Chapter 7.

classroom is connected. Each lesson blending into the next, but also influenced by those preceding it. This principle of fluidity interacts with Framework (non-linear and linear elements) to provide the ELT classroom with temporal/material cohesion. Cohesion is a Clausewitzian principle as well, with social cohesion developing or degenerating over time, that is, in a state of constant change.³⁷ The more cohesive a social system the more adaptable and resilient it is, the more the dialogic function is successful. In other words the more cohesive our class, the more we can experiment, the more we can approach the non-linear bank of our dialectical river, since the cohesion of our classroom community will withstand the chaos of non-linearity. The less the cohesion present the more we are required to remain close to the linear bank. Temporal cohesion would be how each individual lesson fits within a larger framework connected by time. Material cohesion would be the application of technological and material means integrated with theory to achieve the lesson/course teaching aims.

- Language is fluid in that student progress in the language, is like the course of a river, which starts out small and narrow but becomes progressively larger and more complex. As more tributaries flow into the main river (as more interests and value rational and other social action is involved) the wider and more powerful the river becomes (the greater the motivation and appeal of the final result for the student becomes).
- Language is fluid as in the wide range of language situations and urgency.³⁸
- The teacher's options are fluid in the range of materials and approaches the teacher may adopt, adapt or develop.³⁹
- Finally, the very role of student and teacher can be fluid, with the teacher learning from the student. This will be expanded on below when I discuss the BritLit program.

4th F – A Framework is necessary

- This Framework organises and categorises the language, tells the student when, where, how and why it is used, allows the student to see that language more easily as a linguistic system.
- Grammar, vocabulary, phonology, discourse, style and appropriacy are the basis of the framework.⁴⁰
- Consider the image of a water mill (used to signify a lesson), which takes the potential power of the fluid river (raw language) and through its structure provides easy to grasp purpose, that is to grind flour (useful language). Connected with this principle of framework is the structure that the student can have to measure their own progress (exactly where they are in the course book or syllabus) that is establish where they are on a linear scale. Most students and teachers find this reassuring and a motivational element.
- Framework provides us with the linear principles of our theoretical model which interact with non-linear principles to represent dynamic relationships in the ELT classroom, as in

³⁷ Clausewitz uses this principle in various parts of *On War*. The best discussion is probably in Book 8, Chapter 3. Also see my "The Continued Existence of the State: The Clausewitzian Concept of Cohesion" located at <http://www.d-n-i.net/dni/2008/05/14/clausewitz-on-cohesion/>.

³⁸ The English used by the students is in most cases of trivial importance, but the possibility exists that the student's use of English may be of decisive importance in a very serious or even life-threatening situation. These could range from love interests, to job interviews, to dealing with police in a foreign country to even having someone armed in Louisiana yell "freeze". In these situations the student's emotional or material happiness or even physical survival may depend on their abilities in English. This aspect of fluidity is linked very closely with feedback.

³⁹ The fluidity metaphor of the classroom as a ride on a river was taken very positively by several of my advanced English classes, but one student found the metaphor negative, and thought of becoming "seasick". This only reminds us that no matter how student-friendly we may make something, there will always be those who react in unsuspected ways, usually due to subjective experience, in other words react in a "fluid" or non-linear fashion.

⁴⁰ See introduction, Cunningsworth A., *Choosing Your Coursebook*, Oxford, 1995.

for instance providing the linear element of social cohesion in connection with fluidity's non-linear element of that cohesion.

- Finally, and this is an important point, *framework is the moral element which binds student and teacher, that element being trust*. Without trust the classroom cannot function any more than most social systems can. Trust is the common element to all lessons, the equivalent of Clausewitz's "principle of destruction" which leaves its mark as the chief characteristic of war.⁴¹ Thus trust is the chief as in "binding" characteristic of education from this perspective.

5th F- Fellow Students

- Unless the student is alone in the class, most of his or her speaking will be with other students.
- Thus, student interaction is necessary to keep the interaction progressing. Friendships develop between students which provide affectual social action motivation.
- By taking risks and attempting to expand their communication abilities they prepare themselves for the fluidity of the situations where they will have to use English.
- Students who share the same cultural background and values tend to have an easier time communicating, whereas groups of students representing numerous cultural backgrounds can offer the opportunity of cultural interaction through the medium of English. Both situations offer many potential possibilities of appealing effectively to value rational, traditional or affectual social action.
- There are many potential possibilities of friction associated with fellow students, as is the role of chance.

At this point we can identify certain affinities between the three elements or ideal types and the five operating principles. For space considerations we limit it to the three material elements, but connections with the three moral elements of irrationality, reason and chance exist as well. While all three material elements (Student, Language and Teacher) operate within the interlocking "fields" described by the principles there are certain relationships that I would like to highlight:

- Such as between the Teacher and Friction (sorry teachers);
- between the Teacher, Student and framework (as in trust);
- between the Student and his or her Fellow Students;
- between Language and Fluidity;
- between Language and Framework;
- between Fluidity and Framework;
- between Feedback and Fluidity;
- and between the entire system and feedback (which emphasises part of the system's non-linearity).

Consider that the two principles of feedback and fluidity constitute the dynamic of what we term "progress" within the system, while framework provides the linear (and subjective) measure of that progress.

⁴¹ Here once again we see the distinction between Clausewitz's model of a highly complex adversarial social interaction (war) and our also complex, but collective-based social interaction (the ELT classroom). The common element of the former is destruction related to violence, hostility and opposing goals, while of the latter it is trust, based on working together towards a common goal. My point is once again that if we assume that Clausewitz's theoretical framework can be extremely useful in understanding a social interaction of such complexity as war, should an adaptation of his theory, applied to a social system of far less complexity, be at least just as useful?

With the affinities, we end our introduction to our theoretical framework consisting of two social-action/non-linear system models, social action theory and the five operating principles. One additional concept can be mentioned here which provides additional cohesion to the entire system. Both Clausewitz and Weber use sets of conceptual pairs in their theories. These pairs are dialectical in that the tension between them remains unresolved and thus adds to the overall cohesion of the system, just as the tension of a support system holds certain types of bridges together. For our framework we use four sets of conceptual pairs: moral/physical, rational/irrational, means/ends, and linear/non-linear.

This general theory is meant to provide the educator with a system of concepts and models in which to view their own unique classroom experience. This theory can be applied to past experiences, what is going on in the present, or in anticipating future social action orientations. It provides that teacher with a framework, a system for action and is also compatible with a wide range of teaching methodologies.

The BritLit Program and the Madeira Project

The BritLit program was launched in 2003 by Fitch O'Connell.⁴² The goal of BritLit is to help teachers exploit materials based on modern British literature produced by living British authors. British literature – mostly in the form of short stories - is seen as providing a window to modern British culture (including cultural values). From the beginning, Fitch has had a clear understanding of my theory and it has also had an influence on the development of the program.⁴³ The manner in which the materials are put together in kits allows the teacher to pick and choose what they think best for their own specific classroom situation. Literature can respond well to value rational social action as well as be a stimulant to the imagination. BritLit also promotes the students to come up with their own alternative endings and character development which provides the student with a subjective cultural good.⁴⁴ What the close relationship between my theory and the development of BritLit has achieved is the perfect match from a Clausewitzian perspective of theory working closely with praxis and in turn being influenced by actual events, or simply theory influencing praxis and then in turn being expanded and validated through this close interaction with praxis.

At the IATEFL conference this year I presented a case study based on a specific BritLit project entitled, *Shared Creativity: Exploring the Interaction Between Cultural Diversity and Innovation*. The specific project involved the British/Sri Lankan author Romesh Gunsekera. The project began in 2004 when Romesh was invited to present his story, *Carapace*, to two Madeiran state schools. As Romesh describes it the situation was a very different experience to what he was used to:

When I reached Madeira I was told that the programme there might be slightly different. The two schools I was visiting wanted to do a presentation and I was not required to do the usual reading and Q&A session.

I am very used to visiting schools all over the world and talking to the students to show them the magic of what language and reading and stories can do. But this was the first time that they, my audience, would show me what language and stories could do for them, and what they could do for my stories. It was the most extraordinary experience I have had in a school.⁴⁵

⁴² Refer to the BritLit website at <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/resources/britlit>.

⁴³ Refer to "Literary Farmers" mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

⁴⁴ Refer to Ferradas, Claudia "Enjoying Literature with Teens and Young Adults in the English Language Class", published in *BritLit: Using Literature in EFL Classrooms*, APAC, Girona, Spain, 2009, pages 35-42.

⁴⁵ See Gunsekera, Romesh, "On Island to Island, The BritLit Project in Portugal and Its Flowering in Madeira" published in *BritLit: Using Literature in EFL Classrooms*, pages 65-67.

From this theory perspective, what Romesh saw was the result of a high degree of social cohesion and the resulting complex interaction led to the creation of a new work of fiction, a book that was the result of this inspiring interaction. The book, *The Spice Collector*, was published in a bi-lingual edition in 2009 as part of Funchal's 500th Anniversary. Romesh is still in contact with the schools, who are using his new work, so the interaction continues.

The two state schools in Madeira were able to use Romesh's story in a variety of ways: the language department focused on the language, the drama department focused on a play in English adapted from the story. The Music department composed music to fit the play. The biology department studied the flora and fauna of Sri Lanka and allowed the children to draw plants and butterflies that then graced a series of large murals that the art department put together and displayed. Teachers and students also made costumes for the play and for the singers to wear during a musical production. When Romesh visited the school, the students were eager to show them their own contribution to the entire project, having created for themselves a cultural good within a social cohesive collective that put high value on the opportunity of the author's visit.

The key to the success of whole project was the preparatory work done especially by the teachers. As one of the teachers involved, Maria de Carmo Marques told me,

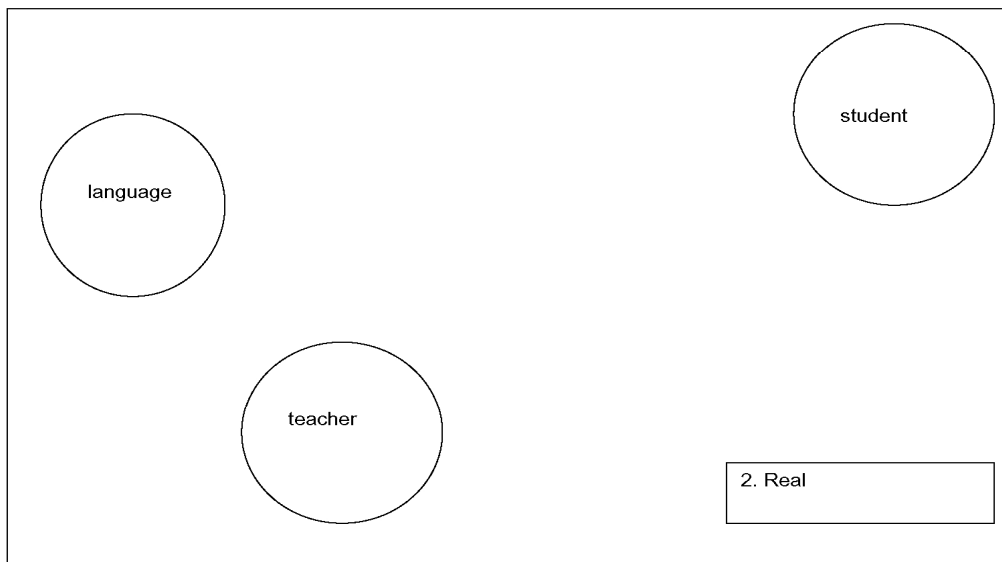
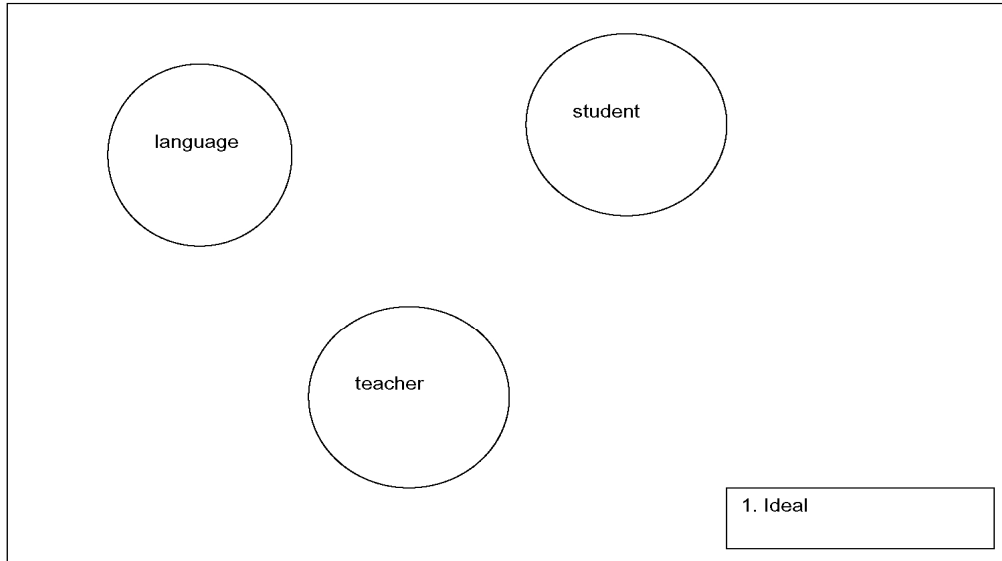
It's important to have students and teachers involved because this way they will read the writer's texts willingly, they will use them as inspiration to create their own work, be it writing, singing, performing or painting. Each event must be an event none of us will ever forget because we were all there and we all took part. . . To other teachers I would only say something that may sound trivial but which is true: You have to believe that your work as a teacher is important and that you are the one who has the key to open doors . . .

Another result, also predicted by the theory, was the non-linear quality of the effect the English-language centered event could have on a student's life. The student who played one of the main characters in the play based on *Carapace*, found drama to be something that she particularly enjoyed and was good at which prompted continued participation over a course of years: an unforeseen event which was the result of a non-linear interaction/opportunity.

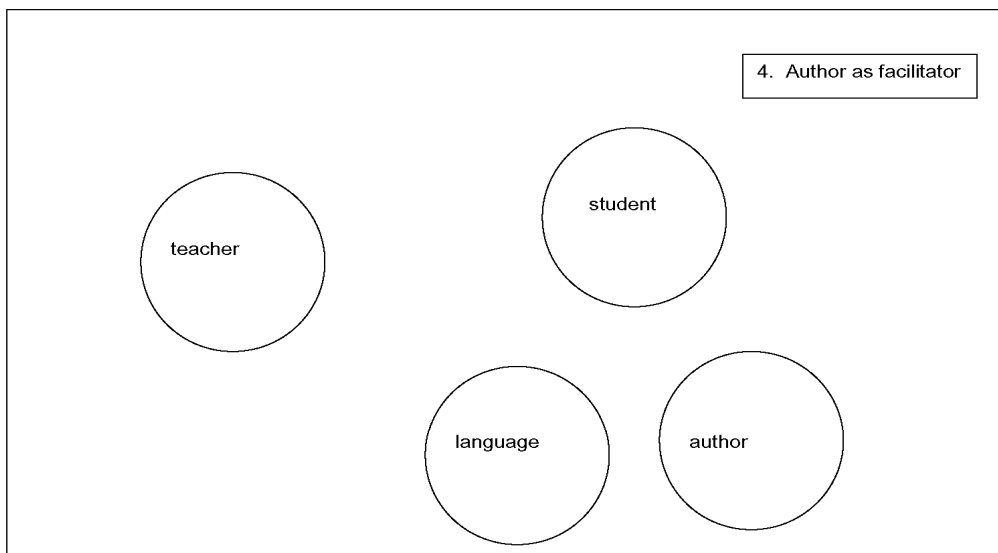
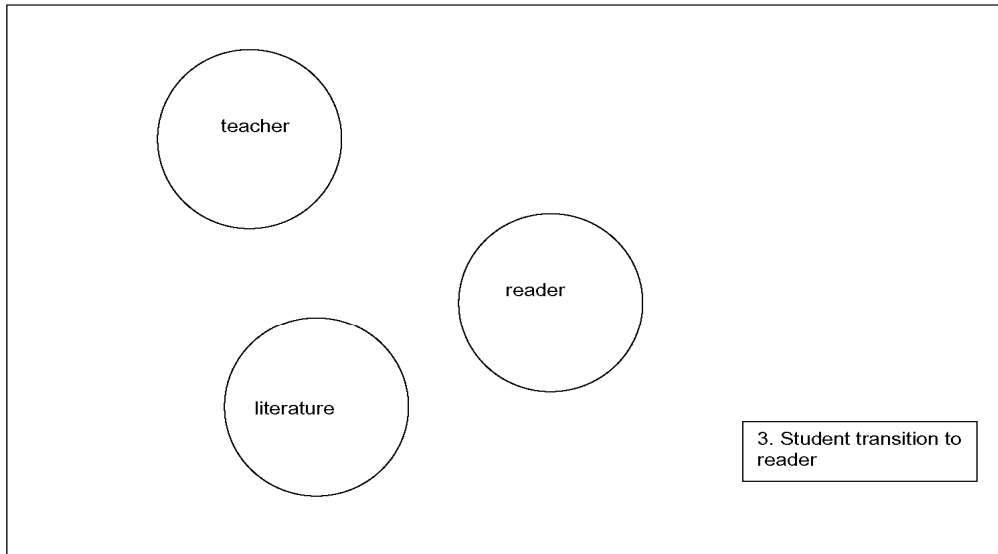
There was an additional aspect that actually expanded the theory and that was the addition of a fourth element to our Student-Language-Teacher mix. The fourth element of "Author" provided a highly motivating stimulus and added extra complexity to the interaction. Teachers many times comment that they are "facilitators" rather than educators, but in this instance we have an actual facilitator who comes from outside and has no interest in operating according to a specific plan. In an interview I conducted with Romesh in preparation for the IATEFL presentation I asked him if he was worried that the students might do something with his work that he had not anticipated, that "they might take you someplace you had not expected and were not prepared to go". His response was enlightening to me as a teacher since he was perfectly at ease operating on the edge of chaos so to speak, that is very close to the non-linear river bank in our model. Teachers are rarely so inclined, and many times worry about losing control and that the lesson may stray too far from the dictates of the syllabus.

This all can be illustrated using the remarkable trinity model. In the Figure 6, Nr. 1 we have the ideal interaction of Student-Language-Teacher. Nr. 2 shows a more realistic interaction with the student partially isolated.

Figure 6



The Madeira project was a perfect example of praxis expanding on theory. In Nr. 3 we see Literature replacing Language and Reader replacing Student. And finally in Nr. 4 we have the addition of a fourth element of “Author” who acts as a real facilitator in the classroom, not concerned with maintaining control of linearity. For this reason we place the teacher as being potentially the more isolated element, although as we saw in Madeira the task of the teacher is more important than ever in setting up this interaction by preparing the student for the extraordinary event which interaction with the author provides.



Conclusion

Let me start with a list of conclusions concerning this theoretical system and its characteristics:

- The students are learning English not only as a means to an end (instrumental rationality), that is to assist them in their professional development, but due to other motivations as well (traditional, affectual, and value rational social action).
- The ELT classroom is a non-linear system of constant interaction over time between three elements (student, teacher, language). While there are countless interactions and events going on, we focus on social action, specifically instrumental rationality (because the student is in the class with the instrumental goal of learning English) in our causal

analysis, but with the intention of responding to other forms of social action as well during the period of instruction.

- Each separate ELT classroom occurrence provides a different teacher-student-language trinity and each lesson is unique and unrepeatable, yet the ELT classroom as a whole also exhibits variable degrees of cohesion - social, temporal, and material.
- Learning is a struggle against resistance, not just with the language, but also against friction which is ever present.
- The teacher is the main force against unwanted friction, but much more than that, the teacher must develop a highly varied style of coping with classroom situations as they present themselves as well as strategic (that is, long-range) planning in order to appeal to all types of social action.
- The teacher is *always* operating with incomplete information as to student motivation, needs and expectations.
- Eventual success is uncertain given the nature of the non-linear social interaction, but a social theory of the ELT classroom can aid the teacher greatly in what has happened in the past, what is happening during the lesson, and anticipated responses in the future.
- Given that the ELT classroom is a non-linear system it is dependent on the initial situation in the class which influence how the system develops..
- The Student's knowledge of his or her own responsibility in their success and of the non-linear nature of the ELT classroom as well as fluidity, framework and feedback as components of "progress" can give them every incentive to speak only English during the lesson.
- With the language come a whole variety of values associated with that language and its culture. Students are exposed to these values not only in the ELT classroom but especially outside when exposed to cultural goods presented in that language.⁴⁶ Part of the duty of the teacher is to aid the student in understanding the value choices that he or she is being confronted with through English. Thus critical thinking, rated to the maturity of the class, is a necessity in the ELT classroom, and an integral part of our theory.
- These values once again are connected with the language and British/US/Western Culture. While instrumental rationality is a prime motive of the student, it need not be the only value that we address or communicate. By addressing other motivations we increase student appreciation and provide dynamism to the system, as well as indicating that we are not only driven by "base" economic interests. This can be a very important consideration in dealing with students from very traditional, that is non-Western, backgrounds. Connected to this is also the consideration that the culture and values connected with English could be a source of friction for some students.
- A topic covered in class can potentially awaken great interest in the student (that is appeal to unexpected/unknown motivations) make them change their course of study or even professional emphasis, that is have a non-linear effect on the course of their lives.
- This type of theory is descriptive and very closely tied with praxis, that is praxis acts as test ground and expander of theory, which is the Clausewitzian ideal.
- Finally, trust is the "glue" that holds the moral framework of the classroom social system together. Various approaches must be applied to ensure and promote trust between student and teacher and among students.

⁴⁶ "values always attach to cultural objects. Therefore we shall call them goods, in order to distinguish them as valuable entities from the values as such . . . law, the state, custom, science, language, literature, art, economy, and the technical means necessary for their preservation are cultural objects or goods precisely in the sense that either the value attaching to them is acknowledged . . . or its acknowledgement is expected of them". Quoted in *Politics, Death and the Devil*, p 295.

What is presented here offers a new paradigm of the ELT classroom. I say that aware of all the gravity of that statement along with the understanding of the risks involved.⁴⁷ If we settle on a simple definition of paradigm, that of looking at something from a particular perspective, by changing that perspective, we change the way we perceive it. In this way, “new paradigm” fits this theory.

One hundred years ago, classrooms in Western countries were considered places where young people were taught and conditioned the proper way of living in their societies. The teacher was not only “a provider of knowledge”, but a role model, an authority figure, and a source of physical punishment. The classroom was a place of discipline and regimentation.

Since that time, starting in the 1960’s, a new paradigm has replaced that old one. The emphasis has been on technique with the teacher seen not as a provider or holder of knowledge, but as a “facilitator” of learning. Many very rewarding ideas have developed from this fundamental change, with no one arguing that we should go back to the old way of doing things. The limiting factor has been that some education professionals have not considered the social complexity of language, in that it was bound to specific cultural and value elements (cultural accommodation), and the complexity of the social setting itself. The tendency has increasingly been to refine technique and treat the social setting in terms of entertainment⁴⁸ and then ignore the value elements. Too often educators and theorists have claimed that the language they teach is somehow “value free” and that they can safely avoid these elements which many find uncomfortable.

In terms of our trinity of teacher, student and language, we can say that one hundred years ago in Western countries, the emphasis was too focused on the teacher, whereas starting in the 1960’s the focus was more on the language, while today with economic concerns weighing ever more dominate, the emphasis is shifting to the student. This could be considered positive, but in what areas are we approaching the student? All too often it seems to be in terms of keeping them “entertained” or satisfying their instrumental rationality with the supposed value they are receiving for their “investment”. As Clausewitz warned (see note 7 above) theory cannot ignore any one of the basic elements, or fix an arbitrary relationship between them. This holds true for the ELT classroom as well. The nature of the social interaction we are dealing with precludes ignoring them.

Given the need for clear understanding and communication in the world today, much of it carried out in English, it is important that we understand better the full impact of many of the changes associated with “Globalisation”, modernisation, and now a "Global War against Terror". All these are intimately connected with subjective values associated with English-speaking cultures, transmitted either knowingly or unknowingly through the language. This new paradigm of looking at the ELT classroom is an attempt to rectify this imbalance.

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⁴⁷ See Kuhn, Thomas, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp 176-181. Applying “paradigm” to the social sciences is contrary to what Kuhn had in mind, but today use of the term “paradigm” in these areas is common.

⁴⁸ I am not arguing that entertainment has no place in the classroom, or that it can not be useful, rather that before we get to the point that we are providing the students with popcorn and softdrinks in class, perhaps we need to consider its limits. This would include both teacher and student value rational considerations as well.