



American University of Armenia

ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԱՄԵՐԻԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ

**THE ROLES OF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS IN THE ENGLISH
TEACHING CLASSROOMS OF ARMENIA**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

by

Gohar Hovakimyan

2007

The thesis of Gohar Hovakimyan is approved

Robert Agajeenian

Marianne Celce-Murcia

Sivakumar Sivasubramaniam, Committee Chair

American University of Armenia

2007

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the people who supported me while carrying out this research and completing my thesis. The first person I would like to acknowledge is my thesis supervisor Dr. Sivakumar Sivasubramaniam, for his noteworthy assistance, instructive guidance, and immeasurable patience throughout the process of writing the thesis. I am grateful to my second major reader, Dr. Robert Agajeenian, for his encouragement and insightful comments. I was also fortunate to have such a knowledgeable and outstanding professional as the Dean of the Department of English Programs Professor Marianne Celce-Murcia as my third reader.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues and students in the school of the Armenian-Foundation, an educational foundation, for their assistance in data collection. It would have been impossible to implement the research study without their participation. My special thanks go to the administrative staff of the same school for giving me the opportunity to carry out the research.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all my friends for their moral support and inspiration, which I needed greatly in this undertaking.

Abstract

This study sets out to investigate if the roles of teachers and learners in the English teaching classrooms of Armenia are affected by the tendency to shift from traditional teaching methods and teacher-centered classrooms to communicative language teaching (CLT), learner-centeredness and learner autonomy. The study aims to discover to what extent Armenian society is open to changes in foreign language teaching methodology by observing a number of English teaching classrooms and interviewing teachers and learners in different schools not only in the capital of Armenia, but also in Gyumri. A research project was carried out at one of the English classrooms in the “Armenian-Education” school of the Educational Foundation in Yerevan within a three-month period, i.e. an academic semester. The subjects were seventeen second-year students who were exposed to the learning techniques as recommended by the literature on communicative language teaching. The findings of the study indicate that a change in language teaching methodology, and consequently in the roles of teachers and learners is not currently observable in Armenian society. However, the implementation of innovations attracts the attention of both teachers and learners. In spite of certain inconsistencies in the attitudes and beliefs of the subjects in the learning processes, the learners demonstrated tremendous interest in the roles that they obtained as a result of the implementation of certain techniques characteristic of CLT.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	3
2. 1 Origination of CLT and its impact on teacher/learner roles	3
2. 2 Factors influencing the roles of teachers and learners	5
2. 2. 1 Classroom culture	5
2. 2. 2 Interpersonal factors	6
2. 2. 3 Task-related factors	10
2. 2. 4 Roles of learners in discourse	11
2. 2. 5 The roles for language teachers	12
2. 2. 6 Learner involvement	17
Chapter 3: Methodology	20
3. 1 Research questions	20
3. 2 Part 1: Observations and interviews	21
3. 2. 1 Setting, participants and procedure	21
3. 2. 2 Observation questions	22
3. 2. 3 Interview questions	23
3. 3 Part 2: The Experiment	24
3. 3. 1 Participants and setting	24
3. 3. 2 Procedure	25

Chapter 4: Presentation and Discussion of Findings	27
4. 1 Observations	27
4. 1. 1 Analysis of the observation findings	30
4. 2 Interviews	32
4. 2. 1 Interviews with teachers	32
4. 2. 2 Interviews with learners	34
4. 2. 3 Analysis of findings	37
4. 3 Experiment	38
Chapter 5: Conclusion	44
5. 1 Summary of the research findings	44
5. 2 Limitations of the study	45
5. 3 Suggestions for further research	46
5. 4 Significance of the study	46
References	47
Appendix 1	50
Appendix 2	53
Appendix 3	55

Chapter One: Introduction

In recent decades there has been a noticeable tendency in the field of foreign language teaching to bring about a shift from the traditional grammar-translation approach to the implementation of other methods, mainly communicative language teaching (CLT). Much literature emerged on communicative language teaching, and a number of teacher training courses developed as a result, aimed to encourage the use of communicative techniques and to bring about a gradual shift to learner-centered classrooms and learner autonomy. An examination of the literature on communicative techniques and learner autonomy makes it obvious that this new tendency brings about considerable changes in the roles that teachers and learners perform in the processes of foreign language teaching and learning. My research aims to discover the current roles of teachers and learners in English teaching classrooms in order to see if the shift is noticeable in Armenian society as well, and if not, what actually happens between the teachers and the students in a class.

As the concept of roles is rather broad and involves a number of aspects, my thesis focuses only on those aspects of teacher/learner roles, which are related to the changes seen/noticed as a result of the shift from traditional methods and techniques to the communicative method of language teaching. The study aims to find out if there is any shift from teacher-centered classrooms towards learner-centered ones, and towards learner autonomy. In order to reveal the behaviors underlying the roles of teachers and learners, the thesis examines the relationships of teachers and learners with one another, and with other factors influencing the teaching/learning process.

To have a better insight of how the change from traditional methods and techniques to communicative ones, and from teacher-centered classrooms to learner-centered ones takes place,

if it happens at all, and how this change affects on the roles of teachers and learners in the foreign language classrooms in Armenia, my thesis presents an experiment in an English teaching classroom, which attempts to achieve learner-centeredness and learner autonomy by focusing on the implementation of techniques suggested by communicative language teaching.

The thesis consists of: *a literature review* (chapter two), in which the literature on the teacher-learner role relationship in traditional methods and CLT, as well as on the factors influencing the roles are determined; *a methodology section* (chapter three), which states the whole process of the research; *a presentation and discussion of findings* (chapter four), where the aspects of research are considered and analyzed; and *a conclusion* (chapter 5), which sums up the results of the study including the contribution of the study, and considers the study's limitations along with suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will first briefly introduce the ‘often observed’ tendency of change from traditional language teaching methods, and from teacher-centered classrooms to more communicative methods, particularly CLT, which includes learner-centered classrooms, and learner autonomy. Then I will discuss the roles of teachers and learners and the different factors that can have an impact on these roles. I believe that these will lay the ground work for my study.

2.1 Origination of CLT and its impact on teacher/learners roles

During the last three decades the term ‘learner-centeredness’ was frequently encountered in the literature on language teaching. The idea of learner-centered classrooms emerged as a result of the humanistic movement in language teaching, which emphasized the whole person, respect for an individual’s subjective experience, the human motivation towards self-realization, self-empowerment, change and development. It “was a humanistic reaction to behaviorist theories that assigned little importance to the variability of learners’ responses to input” (Benson, 2004, p.6). It seems that learner-centeredness led to a shift of focus to the subjective and personal concerns of learners, and therefore moved away from a view of language teaching in which the language code rather than the messages learners wish to convey are assigned centrality. Learner-centeredness is understood as something that is concerned with the learning process itself, particularly, with learners’ affective involvement in their language study. It allocates a central place to learner autonomy, which recognizes the essential role which learners can play in language learning to become full and active participants in the development of pedagogical procedures rather than passive recipients of language teaching. Learner autonomy refers to

various forms of independent or self-directed learning. It involves learner awareness of learning goals, participation in decision making, and personal assumption of responsibility (Tudor, 1996).

As a result of discontent with the essentially code-based view of language teaching, during the 1970s and 1980s applied linguists and language educators began to re-evaluate pedagogical practices in the light of changing views on the nature of language and learning, and the roles of teachers and learners. The desire to develop course-design structures which are more flexible and responsive to learners' real-world needs led to the origination of communicative language teaching (CLT) (Nunan & Lamb, 1996).

An examination of CLT leads me to infer that communicative language teaching contrasts traditional language teaching in relation to pedagogical procedures and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. In traditional methods materials are primarily teacher oriented and the dominating activities are dialogues and drills, repetition and memorization, while in CLT task-based and authentic materials support the primary role of promoting communicative language use. As the views on the nature of materials and activities, as well as on the various aspects of language and learning change, the nature of teacher-learner roles are bound to show different characteristics. The main difference I wish to stress is that in traditional methods learners are viewed as "organisms" that can be directed by skilled training techniques to produce correct responses, and teachers are central and active. They provide models, control direction and pace. In CLT the learner is viewed as a negotiator, interactor, giving as well as taking, and the teacher is a facilitator of the communicative process, needs analyst, counselor and process manager (Nunan & Lamb, 1996).

It is my wish to note that classrooms cannot be exclusively defined in terms of a particular methodology. What we need to observe is what happens in the classroom, and whether

a classroom is characterized as “traditional” or “communicative”. This is determined by the relative emphasis on certain features characteristic of each method.

Depending on the method, both teachers and learners perceive certain role expectations. “The roles which teachers and learners choose to adopt, or have forced upon them by institutional constraints, curricular exigencies, classroom materials and tasks, will have a critical bearing on classroom atmosphere, patterns of interaction, and ultimately student learning” (Nunan & Lamb, 1996, p.134). The roles adopted by teachers and learners are not static, they are dynamic and are subject to change. There are certain factors, which influence the roles of teachers and learners.

2.2 Factors influencing the roles of teachers and learners

Learners bring with them their whole experience of learning and of life into their classrooms, along with their own reasons of being there. Teachers also bring experience of life and learning, and of teaching. Teachers also bring the syllabus into the classroom, often embodied in a text-book. But no matter what they all bring, everything still depends on how they react to one another when they all get together in the classroom (Allwright and Bailey,1991).

The examination of the views about the roles of teachers and learners expressed by different authors has led me to identify a number of factors influencing the teacher-learner role relationship, which I shall discuss under the six separate sub-headings that follow.

2.2.1 Classroom culture

One of the factors can be the *culture of the classroom*, which provides tradition and recipe for both teachers and learners in the sense that there are certain understandings about what

sort of behavior is acceptable. These understandings are strengthened by common acceptance by peers. I believe that classroom culture explains the expectations of behavior of the participants involved. "Culture also provides the conservatism which is seen particularly at times of innovation" (Holliday, 1994, p. 24). The close view of the impersonal and task-related factors identified by Wright (1987) helps me find similarities between the culture of the classroom and interpersonal factors.

2.2.2 Interpersonal factors

Interpersonal factors include views about *social position and status; power, and social distance, attitudes and values* held by individuals and groups. These factors also encompass the *setting of the classroom, the level of the learners, personality and learner motivation*. In the paragraphs that follow I shall discuss each of these factors, though they are all interrelated.

Position and status influence the roles of teachers and learners. "In most societies, the social roles of teacher and learner are accorded high or low status respectively" (Wright, 1987, p.12). The differing status and position imply certain *rights, duties, and obligations* on the part of teachers, and sometimes these rights and obligations create social distance between teachers and learners. The rights, duties, and obligations of teachers and learners are related to power. ***Power*** is not shared equally in the relationship between teachers and learners. This fact, combined with perception of status, gives rise to ***social distance***. Wright (1987) states that power is directing or influencing the behavior of others, and he distinguishes the following types of power: *coercive*, the basis of which is punishment; *reward-based*; *referent*, the basis of which is motivation. He believes that different teaching strategies and different learning activities lead to modifications of the initial power, distance equation.

Dörnyei & Murphey (2003) suggest that there is a relationship between status and *spatial position* in groups. The traditional spatial arrangement involves columns of rows of desks with the students facing the teacher. This arrangement does not offer any support for peer interaction. They suggest that a semi-circular seating structure or a circular one allows learners to have direct visual contact with each other to increase communication. Sitting in a circle also fosters interpersonal attraction and involvement.

Other factors included in interpersonal factors are *beliefs and attitudes*. Both teachers and learners bring into the classroom their beliefs and attitudes, which influence the educational process. Attitudes and beliefs between teachers and learners may be different. The different attitudes may be towards teaching and learning or towards each other as people. Tudor cites the observation by Larsen-Freeman (1991) that what teachers actually do in the classroom is as strongly influenced by their set of beliefs about language teaching as by the method or approach which they are following. Teachers have their attitudes, values and assumptions about teaching and learning, which they build up over time and bring with them to the process of teaching. It is my opinion that the beliefs and attitudes that teachers and learners have about learning and teaching are the main barriers that prevent any easy shift from one teaching method to another and the implementation of innovations in language teaching pedagogy.

Tudor (1996) notes that many learners are not prepared to assume a self-directive role in their language study, either because they lack the necessary knowledge and skills, or because their prior learning experience of language study leads them to assume that language learning is an essentially teacher-driven undertaking. The learner-centered approach can also represent a significant challenge to teachers. Some teachers may find it difficult to let go of what they have

been trained to see as their role of decision-maker and controller, and may feel uneasy about transferring responsibility for pedagogic decisions to their learners.

There exists the belief that the teacher's task as the knower is to transmit information to the learners. This approach to education affords the learners little opportunity to practise genuine communicative uses of language in a full range of functional moves or to negotiate for meaning. "Our attitudes may influence how much social distance we feel or choose to keep or whether or not we choose to impose power on others. They contribute greatly to our expectations of other's behavior in certain role relationships"(Wright, 1987, p.21). Nunan and Lamb (1996) observe that behavior problems can occur if there is a mismatch between the perceptions held by teachers and learners about their respective roles. If learners expect that their role is to be the passive recipient of the knowledge delivered by the teacher, while the teacher expects the learners to be active participants in their own learning processes, then there is likely to be confusion, tension, and even conflict. Even the implementation of pair and group work can be problematic in classrooms where there is a mismatch between the expectations of the teacher and those of the learners. If these are not resolved through discussions, the effectiveness of the teaching may be destroyed.

Interpersonal factors also include *the level of the learners*. Learners in different levels prefer different ways of learning. Lower level learners can easily memorize chunks of sentences or certain expressions. In higher levels they begin to think independently and prefer problem solving when learning a language. I have come to the view that the difference in the way of learning due to the level of learners explains the fact that learners of different levels opt to follow different roles in language learning. As cited in Wright (1987), Perry (1968) distinguishes the following stages of personal and cognitive development that a language learner goes through:

- 1) 'Black and white': the learner sees the world in terms of good and bad, black and white. In this stage the teacher is an authority for learners who can always provide them with correct answers.
- 2) 'Everything is relative': at this stage the learner 'accepts the potential diversity of belief and concept, and can perceive that everything is relative'. The learner can see another person's point of view.
- 3) 'Commitment': the learner commits himself to an idea or concept. Learning a foreign language can be seen as realizing one's true identity or worth (Wright, 1987, p.24).

I think that these stages can be interpreted in reference to the lower, intermediate and higher levels in schools, and provide an explanation of why in the lower levels the teacher is often viewed as an authority and the single source of knowledge, while in the upper levels other possible roles for teachers and learners are available.

Interpersonal factors derive from '*personality*', which all individuals bring to social encounters. "In the intimacy of the teaching/learning situation, it is extremely likely that personalities will be modified. The internalization of the new language may bring about changes in the personality of the learner" (Wright, 1987, p. 46). Teachers may attempt, for example, to create a warm and supportive classroom atmosphere where all the learners have close relations. On the other hand, they may attempt to control the attitudes and thoughts of the learners.

Learner motivation also influences the teaching/learning process and also the role expectations of learners. Motivation can be integrative and instrumental. Cultural beliefs about learning a language influence the motivation people have towards learning that language. If the society values the activity, then there will be 'integrative' motivation. This type of motivation also occurs if there is a love of a foreign culture, their way of life and a desire to 'be like others'.

Desire to do well at school or future job requirements are factors which cause ‘instrumental’ motivation. If learners of a foreign language have high motivation, they will want “to synchronize their roles with their teacher’s role and to co-operate in the arduous task of learning the language in question in order to maximize the benefits they receive with higher status, better jobs, or a sense of personal achievement from mastering the language” (Wright, 1987, p. 31). The extent of learners’ participation in class also may depend on the type of motivation. Learners with ‘integrative motivation’, who wish to learn in order to relate to the speakers of the target language, tend to be much more active in class (Allwright and Bailey, 1991).

The factors that were discussed so far combined under the heading of interpersonal factors. The presentation and data discussion chapter of the thesis will show how these factors are realized in the interpretation of the roles obtained by teachers and learners in the English language classrooms.

The other group of factors that I shall discuss in this chapter of the thesis are *task-related factors*, identified by Wright (1987).

2.2.3 Task-related factors

Task-related factors deal with teachers’ and learners’ expectations about the nature of learning tasks and the way in which individuals and groups deal with them.

Wright distinguishes two main elements of a task – the cognitive, or ‘*thinking*’ aspect, and the affective, or ‘*feeling*’ aspect. “When groups work on a task, they take up roles, which bring together the cognitive and affective aspects of the task” (Wright, 1987, p. 34).

Any learning task involves the learning groups in two ways:

- 1) *Task-related activity or interactivity*: the nature of the learning activity and the way it is managed enhances different levels of learner and teacher involvement.
- 2) *Interpersonal activity or interpersonality*, which is dominated by learners' own contribution.

Wright (1987) distinguishes “closed” and “open-ended” activities. The activity is ‘closed’ if the answer is held by the teacher in view of his superior knowledge of the target language. If there is no one correct answer or its equivalent, the activity is ‘open’. “Learners have more control over an ‘open’ activity and are much freer to reach their own conclusion in their own time” (Wright, 1987, p. 105). Depending on the activity, the teacher has to decide whether to join in the activity as an equal member or to remain in the background in order to help and observe. “By systematically speaking less, waiting longer after posing a question, or calling on learners we might have previously ignored, we may see different patterns of behavior emerge. We can be aware of how our own participation in negotiated discourse influences the type of practice and learning opportunities that result” (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p.135). The presentation and discussion of data in chapter four of the thesis discusses the two types of activities, the ways they are managed, and accordingly, different levels of teacher and learner involvement.

2.2.4 Roles of learners in discourse

Littlejohn (1997) proposes the following roles for the learner in the discourse:

- Initiate: this refers to a situation, which contains no constraints or supports; learners can say what they wish.

- Respond: refers to a situation in which learners are expected to express themselves using language which has been pre-defined (such as in guided writing task). Learners have no control over what they are to say.
- None: this refers to a situation where the learners are not expected to enter into the structuring of the discourse. They simply attend to what is being presented to them, for example, in the presentation of a grammar rule.

The consideration of these roles will serve as background for presenting and discussing the roles of the learners in the English language classrooms in Armenia. The sections that follow discuss the roles that teachers fill in teaching English in the classroom.

2.2.5 The roles for language teacher

Allwright and Bailey (1991) state that teachers plan three major aspects of their lessons. First, they plan what they intend to teach – the ‘syllabus’; second-‘method’, teachers normally go into the classroom with a predetermined plan for how the syllabus is to be taught; third- most teachers have a good idea of the sort of ‘atmosphere’ they would like to have in their classrooms, and do their best to set up such an atmosphere (whether they want it to be relaxed and friendly, or brisk and business-like). It is one thing to have plans, though, and quite another to bring them to life in the classroom. The language teacher has to interact with the learners to implement any plans, and this inevitably means that even the most detailed and carefully worked out plans will give rise to slightly different lessons each time they are used. The outcome will be the result of interactive processes, and therefore necessarily different from any plans. “The way the learners actually go about learning during the lesson is not simply a direct reflection of the teaching

method the teacher employs, even though the method may be the most obvious influence”(Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p. 24).

No matter how well the teacher does his or her job, what any one learner can learn from each lesson will depend on what happens in the course of classroom interaction, and on whether or not that learner bothers to pay attention to the different learning opportunities that arise (Allwright and Bailey, 1991).

Many teachers have experienced the difficulties that arise when their approach to organizing course content does not match with the learners’ expectations as to what a language course should involve. For instance, learners from traditional educational systems sometimes react negatively to attempts by new teachers to teach communicatively, or to organize a situational or functional syllabus, if they feel that grammar is the proper focus for a language course and that everything else is just wasting time or, perhaps more positively, having fun (Allwright and Bailey, 1991).

On the other hand, Gaies and Bowers (1990) in Tudor (1996) claim that the prescription of new teacher-learner role relationships in the classroom may also cause a problem for a teacher who has been trained within a specific approach to teaching. If there is a mismatch between old and new perceptions of teacher-learner role relationships, the shift in the roles can be trying for the teacher. “The teacher who is committed to a learner-centered mode of teaching needs to be open to change, and be able to react flexibly to the needs of her students and of the educational context within which she is working” (p. 231).

Wright (1987) suggests that teachers have two major roles in the classroom:

- 1) to create the conditions under which learning can take place: the social side of teaching (a management function);

- 2) to impart by a variety of means, knowledge to their learners: the task-oriented side of teaching. (instructional function)” (Wright, 1987, p. 51).

That is the role of the teacher demands two types of knowledge from the teacher: the procedural knowledge of how to organize and set up classroom activities, and the ‘subject’ knowledge of the language being taught. Teaching *methods and techniques* link these two types of knowledge.

“A primary function of teachers’ management role is to motivate the learners who are demotivated and to nurture those who are already well motivated to the task of learning a foreign language” (Wright, 1987, p. 53). To have a better insight of what the role of a teacher as a manager requires and be able to decide whether the English teachers in Armenian schools have the characteristics of this role, I shall present the ways of achieving the ‘management’ role on the part of teachers as identified by Wright (1987).

- 1) Adopting a positive attitude towards the learners. This can be done by praising and encouraging the learners for positive efforts. “Positive reinforcement will enhance self-esteem, and that will probably lead to better performance on future tasks and better performance is likely to be rewarded with yet more positive reinforcement, and so on” (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p. 199).
- 2) Giving students meaningful, relevant, and interesting tasks to do.
- 3) Maintaining discipline in the classroom, so that a reasonable working atmosphere is established. This does not necessarily mean total silence, rather an atmosphere of calm and a sense of organization.
- 4) Being motivated and interested themselves.

- 5) Involving the learners more actively in the classroom process in activities that demand inter-student communication and co-operative efforts on their part. The results drawn from a number of research studies show that learner involvement in the task and their motivation is higher if group goals are set. “The learners not only perform better but they behave better, too” (Wright, 1987, p. 37). However, Allwright and Bailey (1991) argue that some learners may just not be open at all to the experience of working with other members of the same class. There is also the further possibility that learners may not wish to work with each other because, for example, the more proficient may feel they have nothing to gain from interacting with the less proficient, or the less proficient may feel demoralized by the superior performance of the others. In such cases a lot may depend on just how the teacher manages the class.
- 6) Introducing learners to the concept of self-appraisal and self-evaluation through reports and discussions.

In regard to the role of the teacher in autonomous language learning, for Benson and Voller (1997) the key issue is whether it is possible to ‘teach’ learners how to be autonomous, and if not, what other roles the teacher can have other than as a ‘resource person’ organizing facilities and providing opportunities for learning. But before discussing the role of the teacher in autonomous learning, it is reasonable to discuss what the notion of autonomous learner implies. Being autonomous as a language learner, learners see their relationship to what is to be learnt, to how they will learn and to the resources available. From this perspective autonomy is not a language learning process, which can be learnt as if it were a set of rules or strategies. Rather autonomy is seen as a way of being in the world. Autonomous learners are in an authentic relationship to the language they are learning (Breen & Mann, 1997).

In the literature on learner-centeredness, the variety of terms, such as ‘facilitator’, ‘helper’, ‘counselor’, ‘resource’ reflect a need for teachers to find roles for themselves within the process of autonomous learning. The discussion of these roles will assist me to determine if the language teachers in Armenia possess such roles and decide whether their language classrooms are likely to be teacher-centered or learner-centered.

The teacher’s role as *facilitator* in autonomous learning is viewed as one of support. Holec (1985) in Voller (1997) believes that the teacher as a facilitator fulfills two complementary roles, the first of which shows psycho-social features, and the second which reveals technical features.

The psychosocial features include:

- the personal qualities of the facilitator (supportive, patient, tolerant),
- a capacity for motivating learners,
- an ability to raise learners’ awareness (to help them perceive the utility of independent learning).

The technical features include:

- helping learners to plan and carry out their independent language learning by means of needs analysis, work planning, selecting materials, and organizing interactions;
- helping learners evaluate themselves (monitoring progress, self- and peer- assessment);
- helping learners to acquire the skills and knowledge by raising their awareness of language and learning, by helping them identify learning styles and appropriate learning strategies .

The teacher as *counselor* is viewed as someone to whom learners turn for consultation and guidance. The implication of the teacher as *resource* is that the teacher needs to be

knowledgeable about the target language and the materials available for learning it (Voller, 1997).

Barnes (1976) in Voller (1997) identifies *transmission teachers* and *interpretation teachers*. *Transmission teachers* tend to invoke ‘impersonal authority’ in order to maintain social distance from their learners, and follow external constraints, such as the syllabus or teaching materials. *An interpretation teacher*, on the other hand, consciously minimizes status differences between himself and the learners. In this role, the teacher is more of a resource person or consultant than an authority; he/she is a facilitator, rather than an arbiter, and aims to help learners develop their own learning strategies so that they will not be dependent on him.

While Sheerin (1997) believes that it is the paradox of independent learning that almost all learners need to be prepared and supported on the path towards autonomy by teachers. She thinks that before learners can engage meaningfully in self-access work, there needs to be an initial analysis of needs, a program of work planned and appropriate activities and materials selected. Learners need support in evaluating their progress, reanalyzing their needs, and setting further objectives. The role of the teacher requires great skill and sensitivity, as teachers need to assess learners not only with regard to their language needs but also with regard to their readiness to become independent learners.

The examination of ‘learner autonomy’ makes it clear that autonomous learning requires learner involvement in the educational process.

2.2.6 Learner involvement

Nunan (1997) identifies the following levels of implementing learner autonomy:

- Learners become aware of goals, content and strategies underlying the materials they are using;
- Learners move from awareness to active involvement in their own learning by making choices from a range of content and procedural options;
- Learners intervene in their learning by modifying and adopting goals, content and tasks;
- Learners set their own goals, develop their own content, and create their own learning tasks;
- Learners move beyond the formal learning arrangement, continuing to create their own learning materials from the resources that exist (p. 194).

Dörnyei & Murphey (2003) makes five points about the involvement of learners in the adaptation of materials:

- 1) *Learner commitment*: external or imposed materials can be made internal to the learners by creative involvement in the adaptation process.
- 2) *Learner as materials writer and collaborator*: Learners can be productively engaged in adaptation tasks, which result in the creation of actual teaching materials.
- 3) *Learner as problem solver*: the activity of adapting materials in order to create tasks is a task in itself, and creates a meaningful problem to solve.
- 4) *Learner as knower*: by working on the construction of classroom tasks, based on existing materials, learners change their role from ‘assimilator’ to ‘knower’.
- 5) *Learner as evaluator and assessor*: through the process of adapting materials and producing tasks, learners will be better able to assess the relevance of what they are doing. “Assessment can be used by the autonomous learner as a potentially rich source of

feedback or can be discarded if it is judged to be irrelevant or unhelpful” (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003).

An autonomous learner should be ready for self-assessment, as self assessment raises the learner’s awareness about the mistakes and successes of their own learning, and gives them a concrete sense of participation in the learning process (Dornye and Murphy, 2003).

The issues and insights that I have discussed in my review of literature necessitate that this study pose several research questions, which are presented in the methodology chapter of the thesis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

I will discuss and explain the methodological issues of my study in this chapter. I will address the data collection procedures, the rationale and scope of my inquiry. It explains why the study was conducted, and the way it was conducted.

Before doing my research I had certain assumptions about the roles of teachers and learners from my own experience as a learner and as a teacher in school. Having examined the rapidly growing literature on language teaching methodology, I believed that there could be a change in the roles of teachers and learners under the influence of certain factors, such as the use of techniques suggested in communicative language teaching and also a tendency toward learner autonomy in foreign language learning.

3.1 Research questions

The issues and insights that I have discussed in my review of literature necessitate that this study pose the following research questions:

- What are the roles of the teacher and the learners in the English teaching classrooms of Armenia?
- Can the use of communicative methods and techniques bring about changes both in the roles of the teacher and learners?
- Can the change of approach in the classroom from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered, or a change in the teacher's role from that of an authoritarian figure to a facilitator have a motivating and positive influence on the teaching/learning process and lead to learner autonomy?

To obtain answers to these questions required that I collect data in the language teaching classrooms of Armenia. The data collection procedure consisted of two parts: *data collection via observations and interviews* and *data collection via an experiment*.

3.2 Part 1: Observations and interviews

The aim of the observations and interviews in different English classrooms was to discover what actually happens in the majority of language teaching classrooms in Armenia. They also aimed to find out if there has been any change in foreign language teaching methodology and consequently in the roles of teachers and learners in regard to the tendency to change from traditional teaching methods and teacher-centered classrooms to communicative ones with learner-centeredness and learner autonomy.

3.2.1 Setting, participants and procedure

Data were gathered from eight different schools in Armenia, three of which are in Yerevan, and the remaining five in Gyumri. All the classrooms observed were of different levels. The selection of the schools and classrooms for observations was done on a random basis. Collection of data lasted for four weeks. Two classrooms were observed each week. Notes were taken during the observations which allowed for further examination of the relationships among teachers and learners. In addition, at the end of each lesson, I conducted interviews with the teachers of the classrooms observed. All the teachers interviewed were female English teachers. Five of them (later referred as T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5) were in their late twenties or early thirties, and the other three (T6, T7, and T8) were old enough to have teaching experience of about 17-25 years. It should be noted that T6 was a student teacher studying the American University of Armenia, with 17 years of teaching experience.

I also conducted interviews with two learners in each class. Sixteen learners were interviewed (15 girls and one boy) representing 8 different levels (from the 3rd to 10th grade) and different schools. The selection of the learners interviewed was based on their willingness to participate in the investigation. The interviewees, however, will remain anonymous. The questions were asked in English, though learners preferred to answer them in their native language, Armenian.

My rationale for gathering data from so many different classrooms was to provide a more general view of what is happening in the majority of English language classrooms in Armenia. The reason that the data were collected from different level classrooms was given to participants my goal to investigate if the level of learners can be a factor influencing the teacher-learner role relationships.

3.2.2 Observation questions

The areas that were observed in the classroom were the level of the learners, the setting and arrangement in the classroom, and the dominating activities and patterns of interaction. The observations aimed to answer questions such as:

- Are there any features characteristic of CLT?
- Is the classroom teacher-centered or learner-centered?
- Is there learner autonomy in the classroom?
- Is there an observable social distance between the teacher and the learners?
- Are the activities closed or open-ended?
- Is there any group-work or pair-work?
- What are the patterns of interaction among the teacher and the learners?

3.2.3 Interview questions

Interviews were used for revealing the beliefs and attitudes that both the teachers and learners bring to the classroom and their influence on the educational process. They were conducted both with teachers and learners to see if there is a mismatch between the opinions of the teachers and the learners about the teaching and learning of the English language. The questions asked were open-ended to give the participant respondent a chance to answer freely.

The questions the teachers were asked are the following:

- What rights, duties, and obligations to your learners do you think you have?
- What rights, duties, and obligations do you think your learners have?
- How do you think learners should participate? Should they work under your strong direction, or should they have some autonomy?
- How do you establish order in your classroom?
- Do you think it is important for learners to set personal goals for themselves?
- Can motivation be increased by the choice of appropriate activities?

The questions the learners were asked are the following:

- What rights, duties, and obligations to you do you think teachers have?
- Do you often ask your teacher for clarification or additional explanation if you do not understand the lesson?
- What do you think your teachers expect from you?
- How does your teacher establish order in the classroom?
- How do you like learning: individually, in pairs, in groups?
- Do you have any personal goals for learning a language?

- Are there any activities that you like most? Which are they?
- Do you take part in selecting the activity or the material that you work with?

The questions were not asked in the way they are presented in the list. As the interviewees belonged to different level groups, the questions were modified and often translated into Armenian. The learners also expressed their ideas in Armenian. Notes were taken on their answers, but they were not recorded. The answers to these questions are combined and presented in the chapter that follows.

3.3 Part 2: The Experiment

The aim of the experiment I conducted is to see whether the use of the communicative techniques can make students more active participants in the learning process, and can lead to learner autonomy by influencing the roles of teachers and learners. It helps me to relate theory to practice, and to have a better insight into what really happens in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language. The investigation was spread over a period of three months during which I taught my participants on a regular basis. The classes met five days a week, each class lasted 45 minutes.

3.3.1 Participants and setting

The classroom where I conducted this investigation is in the “Armenian-Foundation” school, an educational foundation in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan. The school differs from the other schools in the city as here the learners take English courses from the first year of their academic studies. The participants of the experiment were 17 second-grade learners, 8 boys and 9 girls. All of them were native speakers of Armenian, and had been exposed to English for one academic year and a half. I selected a second-grade classroom for this investigation based on my

prior observations of several classrooms at the school and on my ability to conduct an action research project without a special permission, because of my being the teacher of that classroom.

3.3.2 Procedure

The research followed steps such as planning an action research project, implementing the action, observing the action, reflecting on the observations, and revising the plan. The learners were not treated like subjects and were kept uninformed about what was being investigated, but they were told that they were taking part in an important experiment to see if it would have beneficial outcomes. They were involved as full collaborators from the start and were asked to express their thoughts and concerns if they felt there was something they disliked. After each class I helped the learners to evaluate the lesson by asking their opinions about the strengths and the weak points of the activities. Their suggestions were considered, and this was done in the form of semi-structured (informal) interviews. Questions similar to those asked after each lesson are as follows:

- Did you like the lesson?
- Which part did you like most?
- Would you like to do something similar at the next lesson?
- What would you like to change?
- What can you suggest to make it better?

My aim was to implement as many communicative activities as possible to facilitate more interaction among the learners. Depending on different activities, the setting of the classroom was changed; the desks were arranged in a way that the learners could face one another. The activities were mainly performed in groups and in pairs. At the end of each lesson, the learners were involved in deciding what the plan of the next lesson should be and they were

asked to select the activities they would like to perform. Very often they were presented with a list of activities, which contained authentic materials, such as a picture or a photo (activities similar to the ones performed in the classroom are given in the Appendix 1). The learners were asked to suggest activities they thought they could do with it. When doing pair work or working in groups, I allowed my learners to decide with whom they wanted to work.

Certain activities required the learners to imagine that they were outside the classroom, in a situation they might actually encounter (they had to write a letter and then to send it, or do shopping, or speak with a foreigner who knew no other language but English.) The learners were really motivated and very often they suggested the situations they wanted to deal with. Notes were taken after each lesson, which provided data for the current research. For analyzing the results of the experiment, notes taken during different periods of the experimental classes were compared with one another. Because of the absence of another English teaching classroom at the same level in the school, the experimental classroom was compared with the same level classroom at the same school but where French was taught, and it was also compared with classrooms at the same level but in different schools.

In this chapter I presented the methodology for my data collection, the setting and the participants, which took part in the current investigation. Much data has been collected during the investigation, the trustworthiness of which may be ensured through the triangulation of sources: teachers, learners, personal experience; and triangulation of methods: observations, interviews, and an experiment. In the chapter that follows I shall present and discuss summaries of a few lessons observed in different schools, the answers to the interview questions and summaries of two lessons which were conducted at the beginning and at the end of my experimental teaching.

Chapter Four: Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Given the enormous amount of data collected via observations, interviews and experiment, it is not possible for me to present all of them in this chapter. However, I will present selected strands of data, which I believe will help me discuss my findings with reference to the research questions posed in this study.

4.1 Observations

The data gathered with the help of observations reveal similarity among seven out of the eight classrooms: they all possess features characteristic of grammar-translation method. Only one of the classrooms (taught by T6) had certain features characteristic of communicative language teaching. As the seven classes observed were rather similar, in this chapter of the thesis I shall present summaries of only three of these seven classes observed, taught by T1, T4 and T6.

Observation # 1

Date: 17/02/2007

The first class I observed was in school # 27; in Gyumri. It is an Armenian school. The level of the learners was intermediate, the 8th form. The number of the present students was 20. The class was taught by **T1**, who was 35 years old.

The setting of the classroom was such that the desks were arranged in rows. The learners were sitting in pairs facing the teacher. The teaching method used in this classroom was grammar-translation. T1 entered the classroom, greeted the learners and called the rolls. Then she asked one of the learners, a boy, to read part of the text “The Legend of King Arthur” and translate it. The teacher helped to read the words that were difficult for the boy to pronounce. After the boy had read some part of the text, T1 asked him to stand up and explain the new vocabulary words. The learner made a mistake in the use of the particle to and the teacher

corrected and explained it immediately. Two more learners were asked to read and translate parts of the text. The teacher helped them translate the difficult sentences of the text. After reading, the learners were asked to stand up and answer the questions that were provided in the text-book. The only learners asked were the ones speaking, the others were passive; they had no chance to participate. Sometimes some of them raised hands to answer something during the lesson, but it was the teacher who decided which learner would “have the floor”. Very often the learners were speaking to one another and T1 had to stop the lesson and ask for silence. Then T1 asked the learners to do an activity which was in their text-book. The activity required them to fill in the blanks with the correct forms of the words. I observed that when completing the task the learners made efforts to find responses by themselves.

When 10 minutes were left for the lesson, T1 read the second part of the text and translated. She asked the learners to be ready for the reading and translation of the text for the lesson that would follow.

Observation # 2

Date: 06/03/2007

The lesson that I observed was in school 135, in Yerevan. The level of the learners was the 5th form. The number of the learners present was 26; four of the learners were absent. The class was taught by T4, a 28 year old teacher. The classroom arrangement was as usual: the learners faced the teacher but not one another. T4 greeted the class, asked if there were absent learners, then asked the date (“*What’s the date today?*”; “*Is anyone away from the lesson?*”; “*What’s the task for today?*”) and called the rolls.

After that there was a revision of the previous lesson. The homework assignments were checked, which were translations of sentences and making them interrogative and negative.

Then the new material (*The Printed Word*) was presented. T4 read the text and gave the explanations of the new words. The synonyms, antonyms, word-combinations and word by word translations of the words were presented. For example, when the learners encountered the verb *appear* in the text, T4 also introduced the antonym of the verb *disappear* and based on that example, she explained the use of the prefix *dis-*. Then the learners were asked to bring similar examples. After reading the text for the learners, T4 read the comprehension questions that were following the lesson. Then the learners were asked to do two tasks. The first task required filling in the blanks, and for the second task the learners were to put the verbs in the right tense-forms. The learners suggested to the teacher that they do another task instead of putting the words in the right tense-form, promising to do that at home. The classroom atmosphere was warm and friendly. The teacher often encouraged the learners for their correct responses.

As in nearly all the classrooms observed, the dominating method was the grammar-translation approach. The interaction was from teacher to learners and there was no learner-learner interaction. All the activities were closed. (Activities similar to the ones completed in the classroom are presented in Appendix 2). T4 spoke English at the beginning of the lesson creating an English language atmosphere, however all the explanations were done in the mother tongue of the learners, Armenian.

Observation #3

Date: 26/02/2007

The third lesson observed that I want to summarize here was in the “Armenian-education” school of the educational foundation, in Yerevan. The level of the learners was the 6th form. The number of the learners was 12. The lesson was taught by **T6**, about 43 years old. I chose to include data from T6’s instruction because she was studying at the American University of Armenia, and the methods of instruction she used to address the learners were influenced by the education she was receiving at AUA.

T6 entered the classroom, greeted the class, and asked the date and the topic of the lesson. Then she asked the learners to read the home assignment, which required saying the

sentences in reported speech. If the learners made mistakes, she asked the other learners to answer, if there was no correct answer, she herself provided it. Then T6 introduced the next activity which was about health and body care. The learners were to match sentences with pictures. Those who finished the task raised hands, and T6 asked them to answer. The third activity required making sentences using the words “shouldn’t” and “should”. T6 asked the learners to work in groups of four. Three groups were formed. The arrangement of the classroom, which was like the usual arrangement of the classrooms: desks in rows, was not convenient for this activity. The learners had to change the arrangement of the desks which took them about 7-8 minutes of the class time. The groups which finished the task were asked to wait until the other groups also finished. Then the groups read the sentences they had made. For the next activity, T6 showed a picture, a food pyramid, and asked the groups to decide what food they should eat more, which was useful for their health. She wrote the unfamiliar words on the blackboard and showed the pictures when explaining the meanings of those words. The activity was communicative, and enhanced learner-learner interaction. At the end of the lesson, T6 explained a grammar rule, the formation of the reported speech, and set the homework-task. T6 was speaking English during the lesson. Even if the learners were asking questions in Armenian, T6’s response was in English.

4.1.1 Analysis of the observation findings

Analyzing data we can see that the tendency of the shift from the traditional teaching methods and from teacher-centered classrooms to learner-centered classrooms and communicative language teaching is not observable in the majority of the English teaching classrooms of Armenian. In all the classrooms other than that of T6 the learners read a text in the target language and translated it into the mother tongue. They did exercises, which can be

characterized as closed, translated sentences from English into Armenian. In case of mistakes, the teacher provided the correct answers. The textbook usually guided the lesson. In discourse the role of the learner was to respond to the questions initiated by the teacher. The learners answered the questions of the teacher by raising a hand, and then the teacher provided feedback. Only T6 used activities some of which (the food pyramid) could be described as open-ended, in which the learners were free to express their ideas and not be restricted to certain responses. The main interaction pattern in the classrooms was teacher- learner, there was little learner-teacher, and nearly no learner- learner interaction. When taking a turn, learners obtained the role of a respondent not an initiator; teacher was the initiator. In nearly all the situations observed the teacher was giving the instructions and the learners were following them. In the classrooms observed there was too much teacher domination and a lot of teacher talk. The data revealed no learner autonomy in the classroom.

The *arrangement* of the desks was the same in all the classrooms: teacher facing the learners who were sitting in columns and rows. Teachers feel that this is the right way a class should be arranged as they can see everybody and can move around. “Teachers often do not realize that they have a privileged spatial position in the classroom; they may face whoever they want to talk to, and this leads them to assume similar comfort on the part of the students” (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, p.76). It is my belief that there cannot be one ideal seating arrangement; rather it should be purposefully matched with the type of interaction anticipated or encouraged in particular tasks.

From the observations of the different level classrooms it was interesting for me to investigate that learners at different *levels* have different ways of learning, and this has an impact on their expectations of the teacher’s role. Beginning level learners tend to rely more on their

teacher's knowledge, while high intermediate and advanced level learners are likely to think independently. They make efforts to find responses to their questions by themselves, sometimes referring for information to other different resources as well.

The observations of the eight lessons in different schools showed that the role of the teacher in certain activities could be characterized as that of counselor and resource; however, the role as a facilitator was not evident. Most of the activities were closed and required one correct answer, which was often provided by the teacher. There were very little activities that were open-ended (except for those in T6's lesson), and these again were initiated by the teacher.

4.2 Interviews

Data collected via interviews demonstrate that teachers and learners have their own beliefs and attitudes about each other's roles. The interpretation of the roles is mainly based on these beliefs and attitudes, which affect their expectations about classroom behavior. Interviews were conducted both with the teachers and the learners observed.

As the answers that the teachers gave to each interview question were open-ended and rather similar, in this section I shall present the interview questions and only the summaries of the responses given by the teachers. (The full list demonstrating the questions and responses by the teachers is presented in Appendix 3.)

4.2.1 Interviews with teachers

- What rights, duties, and obligations to your learners do you think you have?

Some of the admitted duties, rights and obligations of the teachers are the following: possessing knowledge of the subject, explaining the lesson and providing a good language model for learners, choosing learning material, punishing learners' misbehavior, imposing

discipline on learners, setting work for learners, making rules of behavior in class, deciding on the procedure for learning. Most teachers (T2) think that they have the right to punish learners who misbehave.

- **What rights, duties, and obligations do you think your learners have?**

Teachers expect their learners to have the following rights, duties and obligations: to attend classes, to be prepared for their assignments, to meet the deadlines, to behave themselves. Teachers often demand silence in the classroom, and do not admit that it is not realistic for learners to speak only when they are allowed to. Learners are also to listen to the explanations of the lesson, to do the tasks in class, to follow teacher's instructions, to ask questions if they do not understand, to demand objective grading, to be responsible for their studies. Many teachers believe that learners are obliged to respect them simply because they hold a certain social role.

- **How do you think learners should participate? Should they work under your strong direction, or should they have some autonomy?**

The idea of learner autonomy is not admitted by most of the teachers and some of them have a wrong understanding of what it includes. Learners are not taken into consideration when making decisions about methodology. There is no needs analysis in which learners are considered, the teachers follow the syllabus imposed on them; and the materials and activities are also selected by teachers. Some of the teachers do not believe in learner autonomy, and are sure that learners can get knowledge only by following their well-defined instructions from the part of the teacher. The dominating role of the teachers interviewed shows that they think that the participation of the learners should be determined by their wish to ask them questions, and that the learners should work under their strong direction.

- **How do you establish order in your classroom?**

In many teaching situations there is an observable level of **social distance** between teachers and their learners and they use their **power** for achieving the desired results. The evidence of this are the data gathered with the help of interviews. When the teacher enters the classroom, the learners stand up. They sit only when they are asked to. In order to establish order in the classroom, some teachers tend to set learning tasks which are completed in total silence.

- **Do you think it is important for learners to set personal goals for themselves?**

Most of the Armenian learners learn English just because English is among their school subjects, and they have no personal goals. In the Armenian classrooms learners are usually passive, they are asked to sit still and speak only when asked to by the teacher.

- **Can motivation be increased by the choice of appropriate activities?**

All the teachers agreed that the choice of the activity was an important factor for increasing learner motivation. The activities that they considered motivating were the ones that were different from the activities that they were doing every day. Such activities could be dialogues, whole class discussions, group-work or pair-work.

4.2.2 Interviews with learners

- **What rights, duties, and obligations to you do you think teachers have?**

To this question all the sixteen learners interviewed answered that the teachers must first of all teach them. They expect the teacher to provide the model of the target language for them. Five of the learners admitted that their teachers had the right to establish order in the classroom. Most learners also expect their teachers to make corrections in their work. They all mentioned

that the teachers should give feedback to their efforts and grade them for their responses. Some learners admitted that their teachers have the right of establishing order in the classroom.

- **Do you often ask your teacher for clarification or additional explanation if you do not understand the lesson?**

Most of the learners said they did, however, five of the learners admitted that they felt embarrassed to tell the teacher that they hadn't understood the lesson. It was interesting to learn that they felt more comfortable to ask questions of teachers who were young. It was also interesting to investigate that the learners at higher levels said they were trying to find responses to their questions by themselves, and often got information from other sources as well. Lower level learners said they ask the teacher if they do not understand.

- **What do you think your teachers expect from you?**

To this question nearly all the learners answered that their teachers expect them to be prepared for the lesson and to behave in an appropriate way.

- **How does your teacher establish order in the classroom?**

Some learners interviewed noted that in many classrooms it is very common that the teacher uses the threat of giving the learner an unsatisfactory mark or not allowing him/her to the next form, as a means of coercing the learners to be silent. A few learners also noted that they were very often embarrassed to ask questions of their teachers, or to ask for additional explanation if the lesson was not clear to them.

- **How do you like learning: individually, in pairs, in groups?**

The interviews revealed that the majority of the learners preferred to work independently, rather than in groups and in pairs. They said they could show their best if they worked alone, and the teacher could better see their efforts in individual work than in group work.

- **Do you have any personal goals for learning a language?**

Not all the learners were aware of the goals for learning a language; most of them said they were learning English simply because it was in the school curriculum. However, a few of the learners said that they were learning it to be able to find a good job. Two girls (9th and 10th form) said that their goal was to enter a university and that learning English would help them.

- **Are there any activities that you like most? Which are they?**

Some learners liked more than one activity. The majority of the learners preferred whole-class discussions about a variety of topics and many of them liked dialogues. Six learners out of 16 interviewed liked close-ended activities, and liked to work individually. Five of the learners liked group work and, four of them liked pair-work.

- **Do you take part in selecting the activity or the material that you work with?**

The answer of this question was negative: the materials and activities are all selected by the teacher.

The interviews with the learners had me suggest that *the age of the teachers* is a factor that together with other factors has its influence on the roles of teachers and learners and on learner's expectations about their teachers' behavior. Learners expect that a young teacher should have more friendly relations with them than a teacher of an older age. They feel more comfortable asking questions of younger teachers, and very often present their suggestions concerning the process of the lesson as if trying to help the teacher in the process of teaching

them. They tend to express their ideas and are more honest when discussing what activities they like or dislike. They are also more active in providing responses.

By this observation I do not suggest that young teachers are more desirable in language teaching. However, it is worth noting that if the teacher with many years of experience may be more intelligent and more skillful, the younger teachers are more flexible and are more ready for power distribution in the classroom.

4.2.3 Analysis of findings

Analyzing the findings presented we can infer that there are certain codes of behavior laid down for teacher and learner roles. *Beliefs* about social behavior in educational settings in Armenia are: learners should address their teachers by the last name; they should raise hands if they want to answer the teacher's questions, they should stand up when answering, learners should respect their superiors, that is, their teachers in the educational situation; teacher's responsibility is to give knowledge; learner's duty is to absorb the knowledge teachers give them; learners should acknowledge the teacher's authority; learners must respect their teachers.

The data from observations and interviews reveal that the *classroom atmosphere* mostly depends on the teacher. He/she can create a supportive atmosphere with all participants being in close relation with one another. The teacher may observe how involved the learners are in their task by the noise level in the room, the tone of conversation among the learners. I observed that for creating the best conditions for learning to take place, teachers should encourage learners for their efforts, give learners responsibility for their learning, and be warm and open with them. I believe that the quality of the relationship in the classroom is the major contributory factor in classroom discipline.

Data analysis supports the view that the level of *social distance* varies according to different teaching/learning *activities*. In my teaching situation, I observed that the level of social distance was lower when learners worked in groups. The learners asked me to approach their groups, or ran to me and asked questions in my ear so that the other groups could not hear. They often discussed their ideas with me when I participated in the activities with them, while in case of individual activities, they tended to keep silent until I called on them for responses.

I believe that a number of activities can be developed which can result in overlapping roles for either teachers or learners, and which can prepare learners for autonomous learning. For example, the teacher may give instructions, then suggest that one of the learners be the instructor, and he/she follow the learners' instructions. The learners can take turns so that every learner has the chance of giving instructions. Such an activity can result in power distribution between teacher and learners, and it can make learners become more responsible and motivated to learn. The teacher-learner relationship can be improved with the help of activities in which the teacher participates as an equal member. Such activities can be role-plays or open-ended discussions.

4.3 Experiment

Before beginning my teaching experiment, I hypothesized that the use of communicative methods and techniques, particularly CLT, might bring about changes in the role of the teacher and learners. I started my teaching by consciously following techniques and activities suggested by CLT principles. Notes were taken after each lesson, which allowed me to observe my actions, reflect on them and revise my plans. At the beginning of the semester I asked my learners to express their opinions about what they wanted to achieve, how they wanted to be evaluated, how

they would like to work in the class, what sort of activities they liked to do, and asked about the desirable seating arrangement.

The reaction of the learners was their increasing interest and motivation. However, at the beginning of my teaching experience, I could not deal with all the pedagogical decisions that I had to make during the lessons. Whether the lesson was teacher- or learner-centered varied according to the activity. The section that follows presents the summary of part of the lesson conducted on the fourth day of my teaching.

I entered the classroom and greeted the learners. They all stood up, greeted me in chorus and sat down, after I asked them to do that. I told the learners that they were going to do something very interesting, and asked the learners to make groups. They looked at me in surprise. Some of them were reluctant to make groups and suggested writing grammar exercises on the blackboard. I promised that they would do that in the second part of the lesson and told that they were going to do something very interesting. Three of the boys joined the groups with great difficulty. Four groups were formed, three groups of four, and one group of five. I gave each group a series of pictures and asked them to make a story. The three boys insisted that they didn't like the activity and didn't want to participate. To solve the situation, I asked the boys to look at the pictures and decide what sentences they could make based on those pictures. Then I asked them to write the sentences they made in the interrogative and negative forms (that was what they wanted).

The vocabulary of the learners was not rich and they experienced problems when expressing their ideas. I had to rely on translations. They told me the Armenian word, and I put the English equivalent of these words on the board. The boys who were working on the blackboard made mistakes, and I had to correct the mistakes by explaining them in Armenian. At

the end of the lesson I was frustrated, feeling that the plan of the lesson that I had designed and was so proud of had failed/ or, at least, hadn't succeeded the way I expected.

Discussing my lesson at the beginning of the academic semester, I see that in my role as a manager, I encountered problems, which can be classified under the area of interpersonal factors identified by Wright (1987). These problems appeared to have been related to the learners' beliefs and attitudes regarding what they should do during the lesson and how they should behave.

At first my learners were reluctant to work in groups, did not like discussions, preferred to work individually, do grammar exercises and get grades for correct responses. Every time after answering a lesson, learners brought their notebooks to get grades which they could show their parents. I tried to give my learners feedback in other ways: by encouraging, praising for good responses, advising them to prepare better, but they seemed to be unsatisfied and at the beginning of every lesson, they asked if they were going to get grades. My expectations that not grading might make learners more interested in the lessons were contradicted by the fact that most learners preferred grading. I believe that this can be explained by their desire to show their parents the results of their learning at home, and their parents want to see these results in grades. These may be expectations that learners and their parents have of every teacher.

I wanted my learners to work in groups, so that I could observe them, but it appeared that the learners were resistant to assuming an independent role in their learning, and wanted me to play a more directive role than I wished. It also happened, while observing, that a significant number of learners appeared to have difficulty in an activity and I had to intervene.

The second lesson that I have summarized and presented in this section was conducted during the last week of the semester.

I entered the classroom. The learners were the first to greet me and asked if I had not forgotten what we had decided to do. I felt they were all very interested. They had brought pictures of cartoons with them, as we had previously decided. Then they shared their pictures with friends and began to decide the role of which cartoon hero they wanted to play. They made their groups without waiting for me to tell them to do that, and began to discuss the situations they would like to appear in. They often turned to me for approval of their suggestions, and I, myself, got involved in performing the role play. Very often they ran to me and asked me to write on the board the words they might use during their performance. The atmosphere of the classroom was warm and supportive.

As the comparison of the two lessons shows, at the beginning of the semester some of the learners had their expectations of how a language lesson should be organized, and they were reluctant to accept my use of any innovations. However, during the semester, after a week or two, they were motivated as much as the other learners of the classroom.

The analyses of this data make it obvious that the shift to learner autonomy and the use of communicative techniques in a foreign language teaching can create a number of problems: learners have other expectations, they are used to the methods they have dealt with and expect similar treatment; a change in the language classroom by one new teacher is not enough to make a change in the learners' mentality.

My experience leads me to assume that achieving learner autonomy is not realistic in beginning level classrooms, as learners do not possess enough understanding about language and learning.

What actually happened in my classroom, was simply that the process of the lesson itself made me decide on the method and technique to follow and consequently on the roles that my

learners and I adopted. Now I admit that even the use of the grammar-translation method and the use of traditional techniques can be very useful if they are used in relevant situations. This point has led me to the conclusion that the main factor in determining the roles of teachers and learners is *when and where to use what*. The use of certain techniques suggested in CLT, resulted in a number of interesting activities and increased motivation in my learners, but my expectation of achieving a complete shift in my role and the role of learners was not fully realized.

By observing other classrooms, I compared the use of the target language in my experimental classroom and in the other classrooms. The lessons in the other classrooms were similar to the ones presented and discussed in the beginning of this chapter. The comparison showed that the learners in the experimental classroom were more active, more sure of themselves, freer in communicating with one another, and made more attempts to express their ideas in the target language. It may be worth mentioning that, as a qualitative researcher, I realize that the analysis of the data is embedded in my own interpretation and perspectives.

I also admit that what I did is simply to introduce learners with what is possible to do. I followed some well-informed procedures which appear to have promoted learner autonomy, and learner-centeredness. The use of the grammar translation method has become a stereotype in Armenian culture, and the culture of the classroom is conservative, resistant to innovations in pedagogy. The main problem of implementing innovations in methodology is overcoming this stereotype. Any form of educational innovation requires the collaborative work of the teachers, and has to be accepted by the other participants (parents, administrators, and so on) in order to be successful (Tudor, 1996).

Achieving learner autonomy in a short period of time is not realistic; however, learners can be introduced to the idea by a number of activities such as taking part in the selection of the

materials or the topic for discussion. By doing the experiment, I attempted to prevent the formation of stereotypes in my learners, making them realize that their ideas and suggestions are very important for teaching and learning to take place. However to have a tangible result, I need the support of other people involved in the educational process of the learners, the awareness of both teachers and learners about the possible changes, their benefits and also the time and efforts of many people concerned.

In this chapter I presented and discussed the findings gathered via presentations and interviews. I also presented summaries of several lessons that I observed and also lessons conducted by me, which allowed me to carry out the investigation of the teacher- learner roles in the English language classrooms of Armenia.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this chapter, I propose to present a summary of the research findings, point out the limitations of the study, make suggestions for future/further inquiry, and explain the significance of the study.

5.1 Summary of the research findings

“Teaching and learning are essentially social activities, implying role relationships between teacher and learner, learner and learner. These relationships are established, maintained, and evaluated through communication” (Wright, 1987, p.10). The focus on teacher and learner roles is essential for establishing a broader view of the language teaching and learning process. A consideration of the roles generates a wide range of important pedagogical issues.

The research findings obtained via the triangulation of such methods as observations, interviews, and an experiment, appear to suggest that in Armenian society EFL teaching methodology still follows the use of the grammar-translation approach and this stereotypifies the roles of the teachers and learners. The teacher becomes an authority figure in the classroom, and learners can learn only by attending classes and following his/her instructions. Both the teachers and learners observed seemed to be satisfied with these roles, and they believed that this was the way the teaching and learning were to be carried out.

The results of the investigation appear to support the implementation of techniques leading to learner-centered classrooms and learner autonomy as they are likely to bring about beneficial results. However these are not enough to bring about considerable changes in the roles of the teachers and learners.

Many teachers agree that teaching should be aimed at bringing about changes in methodology. The adoption of a learner-centered approach to language teaching has a number of

implications for teachers and learners, the most evident of which is the allocation of more active and participatory role to learners, and a role of facilitator to teachers.

The inconsistency between the school's curriculum and the classroom's desired norm system presents teachers with a difficulty in developing and sustaining changes in the classroom, as these changes are determined by a complex set of interrelated factors that depend upon what the learners and the teacher perceive their respective roles to be, and upon a set of decisions taken by them or imposed on them, and beliefs that they bring with them to the learning situation (Voller, 1997).

5.2 Limitations of the study

Several limitations of the present study should be noted. First, the length of the study was limited. It lasted for only 4 weeks. Secondly, the observations were carried out only 8 times, and in different classrooms. Each classroom was observed only once and one class observation may not be enough to create a complete picture of what is really going on in that classroom. Thirdly, the experiment was carried out in a low level classroom, where the stereotypes were not rooted in the learners and it was easier to achieve desirable results. The result might be completely different if advanced level students had been the subjects of the experiment.

Moreover, the absence of a control group at the same level made me to compare the experimental class with the same level classrooms learning French, and the same level English classroom in a different school.

Finally, there is no concrete criterion for my comparisons. They were based on observations, which cannot be a reliable means of identifying the differences that exist between classrooms, as the performance of the learners may be different in every lesson.

5.3 Suggestion for further research

The following directions for further research are suggested by the study: to conduct the research for a longer period of time, at least for a full academic year, with different age groups, and to provide a control group of the same age and learning the same language.

It would also be reasonable to investigate how the understanding and awareness of the teacher-learner role relationships is central to effective teacher development.

5.4 Significance of the study

Achieving an appropriate methodology depends on learning what happens between people in the classroom. The English language teachers in Armenia need to know that the awareness of the change in the roles that they and their learners perform may bring about changes in language pedagogy, revealing more desirable results than they have achieved before by following the methods traditionally used in teaching English as a foreign language. However, in order to be effective, it is important that the implementation of changes be dealt with in the wider school environment and that the new ideas be discussed with colleagues. Only the collaborative efforts of all participants can ensure the implementation of techniques leading to learner-centered classrooms and learner autonomy, which may make learners become more active, be more aware of their goals and be more responsible for their own learning.

References

- Allwright, D. & Bailey, M.K. (1991). *Focus on the Language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnes, D. (1976). *From Communication to Curriculum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin (as cited in Voller, P. (1997). Does the teacher have a role in autonomous language learning?).
- Benson, Ph. (2004). (Auto)biography and learner diversity. In Benson, Ph. & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Learners' stories: difference and diversity in language learning* (pp. 4-21). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benson, Ph. & Voller, P. (1997). *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman.
- Breen, P.M. & Mann, J.S. (1997). Shooting arrows at the sun: perspectives on a pedagogy for autonomy. In Benson, Ph. & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp.132-149). London & New York: Longman.
- Dörnyei, Z. & Murphey, T. (2003). *Group dynamics in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gaies, S. & Bowers, R. (1990). Clinical Supervision of language teaching: the supervisor as trainer and educator (as cited in Tudor, I. (1996). *Learner-centeredness as language education*).
- Gasparian, G., Aghvanian, R. & Davtian, R. (1995). *English for the fifth form*. Yerevan: Luys.
- Holec, H. (1985). 'On autonomy: some elementary concepts'. In P. Riley (ed.) *Discourse and Learning*. London: Longman (as cited in Voller, P. (1997). Does the teacher have a role in autonomous language learning?).

- Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lange, L. D. (1990). A blueprint for a teacher development program. In Richards, C.J. & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp.245-269).Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (1991). Research on language teaching methodologies: a review of the past and an agenda for the future (as cited in Tudor, I. (1996). *Learner-centeredness as language education*).
- Littlejohn, A. (2003). Self-access work and curriculum ideologies. In Benson, Ph. & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 181-191).London & New York: Longman.
- Nunan, D. (1990). Action research in the language classroom. In Richards, C.J. & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp.62-82).Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1997). Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy. In Benson, Ph. & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp.192-203).London & New York: Longman.
- Nunan, D. & Lamb, C. (1996). *The self-directed teacher*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Perry, W. G. (1968). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (as cited in Wright, T. (1987). *Roles of teachers and learners*, 1987).

- Sheerin, S. (1997). An exploration of the relationship between self-access and independent learning. In Benson, Ph. & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp.54-65). London & New York: Longman.
- Tudor, I. (1996). *Learner-centeredness as language education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Voller, P. (1997). Does the teacher have a role in autonomous language learning? In Benson, Ph. & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp.98-113). London & New York: Longman.
- Wright, T. (1987). *Roles of teachers and learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wright, T. (1990). Understanding classroom role relationships. In Richards, C.J. & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp.82-100). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

APPENDIX 1

Activities types used during the experiment.

Basic Story Starters

Look at the picture and write a story about what you see. Use the picture to help describe your story.



Things to think about:

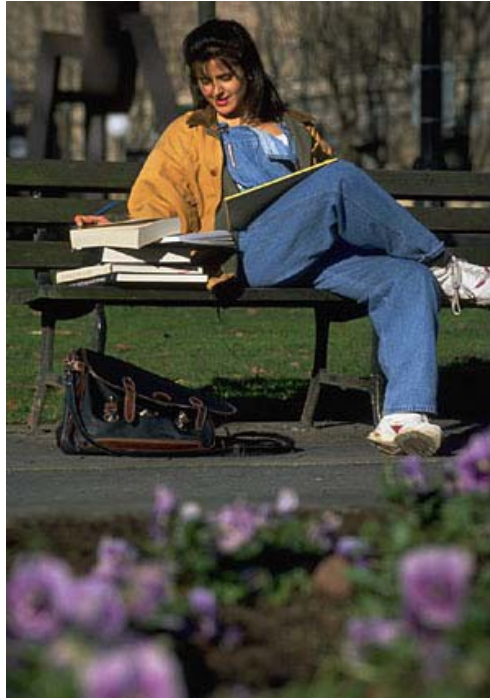
Who is the girl? What would her name be?

Where do you think she lives?

What do you think she's doing?

Basic Story Starters

Look at the picture and describe it.
Things to think about:



- Who is the woman?
- What would her name be?
- What is she doing? Where is she?
- What's in her bag?
- What kind of books are they?
- Why is she looking at them?

APPENDIX 2

Examples of closed activities usually implemented in the English language classrooms.

Activity #1

Read the text and answer the questions.

Everybody at 14 River Street is very busy today. Mr. Anderson is in the kitchen. He is cleaning his kitchen. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas are in the living-room. They are painting their living-room. Mr. Black is in the bedroom. He is doing his morning exercises. Tommy is in his room. He is feeding his dog. Mr. and Mrs. Lane are in the yard. They are washing their car. I am busy, too. I am in my sitting-room. I am washing the windows. I am also looking at my neighbors. It's a very busy day for all my neighbors.

Task1: False or true?

- 1) Mr. Anderson is his kitchen.
- 2) Mr. and Mrs. Thomas are washing their cars.
- 3) Mrs. Black is feeding her dog.
- 4) Tommy is eating.

Task 2: Answer the questions about the story.

- 1) Where is Mr. Anderson?
- 2) What is he doing?
- 3) Where is Tommy?
- 4) What is he doing?

(Gasparian, Aghvastian, Davtian, 1995, p.18)

Activity # 2

Fill in the blanks using the verbs in brackets.

Model: The boy *is playing* tennis (play).

- 1) I a letter (write).
- 2) The doctor a car (drive).
- 3) The girls home from school (come).
- 4) The teacher an English lesson (give).
- 5) We in the classroom (sit).
- 6) I the books into my bag (put).
- 7) The girl to school (run).

(Gasparian, Aghvanian, Davtian, 1995, p. 20)

Activity # 3

Choose the right form of the verb.

- 1) Mary (run/ runs) to school every morning.
- 2) We (speak/ speaks) English very well.
- 3) The man (live/lives) in a big house.
- 4) I (drink/drinks) milk every morning.
- 5) My father (give/gives) Bob money every day.
- 6) Cats (eat/eats) mice.
- 7) The shopkeeper (open/opens) his shop at nine o'clock.

(Gasparian, Aghvanian, Davtian, 1995, p. 24)

APPENDIX 3

Interviews with the teachers:

- **What rights, duties, and obligations to your learners do you think you have?**

T1: I should teach them, explain the lesson, and grade their works.

T2: I have the right of asking them to behave themselves, punishing their misbehavior.

I must explain them the new lesson.

T3: I should follow that my learners bring their books and copy books.

T4: To give knowledge to my learners, provide a language model for them.

T5: My responsibility is to know the subject I am teaching, to set assignments and activities, and to present the new lesson in an appropriate way.

T6: To choose the learning material, to present the new material in an appropriate way, to select motivating materials, to get them work in groups.

T7: To have the knowledge of the subject, to have organizational skills, setting work for learners, to demand silence.

T8: To have a well designed plan of the lesson, to explain the material, to impose discipline on learners.

- **What rights, duties, and obligations do you think your learners have?**

T1: to attend classes, to sit quiet, to be prepared for the lessons, to respect their teachers.

T2: to be prepared for the assignments, to meet the deadlines, to behave themselves.

T3: to be prepared for the classes, to raise hands, if they want to answer, stand up when the teacher enters, respect the teacher.

T4: to be polite to teachers, to do home assignments, to follow the teacher's instructions.

T5: To be silent, to do the tasks in class, to raise hands if they have answers.

T6: to be responsible for their studies, to demand fair grading, to listen to the teacher's explanation, to ask questions if they do not understand.

T7: to do the assignments, to respect their teachers, to ask questions.

T8: to be present for the lessons, to listen to the teacher, to follow the instructions, and to prepare their lessons.

- **How do you think learners should participate? Should they work under the strong direction, or should they have some autonomy?**

T1: learners should raise hands if they know the answers and the teacher will ask them. There is no learner autonomy in Armenia.

T2: in order to learn, the instructions of the teachers should be followed.

T3: the learners should work under the strong direction of the teacher, because most of them do not know what they need.

T4: learners should work under the direction of the teacher because the teacher has a well-defined plan, which he/she brings into the classroom to help the learners in their learning.

T5: learners should be active during the lessons and ready to answer the questions posed by the teacher. Learner autonomy is not very realistic.

T6: learners should be prepared for the autonomy, and be responsible for their own learning.

T7: there are certain materials and plans imposed on the teacher, that is why learners should follow the instructions of the teacher to learn the material required for their level.

T8: the teacher should give instructions and the learner is to follow them. If something is unclear the learner should ask the teacher.

- **How do you establish order in your classroom?**

T1: I give them activities to do individually, and they all work in silence.

T2: I give them task and follow ho they react to it, If they like the task, they behave themselves and there is no need to establish order in the classroom.

T3: I involve all the learners in the teaching process, organize the lesson in a way that learners participate in the class and do not do other things.

T4: Sometimes, I give them activities out of my plan, and encourage them for their efforts.

T5: Order in the classroom depends on the atmosphere that you create in that classroom. As a teacher you should follow that all your learners are in close relations with one another, and you should follow that the learners are interested in the lesson.

T6: I give them tasks, which I know they are interested in. They become motivated and work in a friendly and enjoyable atmosphere.

T7: I set them learning tasks that are completed in total silence.

T8: I know my learners and I do not allow those who like to chat sit near each other.

- **Do you think it is important for learners to set themselves personal goals?**

T1: I don't think that my learners can set personal goals.

T2: Learning English is in the syllabus, and the goals are set not by the teacher but by the administration.

T3: My learners do not know yet what they need, so that they do not have personal goals.

T4: Once I encouraged my learners telling them that they could go to the US if they learn English better, I feel that this motivated a couple of them.

T5: If learners have personal goals, they will surely learn better, but unfortunately most of the learners learn English because they have to.

T6: I think it is very important that learners have their personal goals, as it motivates them to learn better.

T7: Some of the learners have personal goals, and others not. Those who have learn better.

T8: I don't think that my learners can set personal goals, but if they do I think that will help them to do their best.

- **Can motivation be increased by the choice of appropriate activities?**

T1: Yes, there are certain activities which increase the motivation of the learners.

T2: My learners are motivated when they deal with activities such as dialogues.

T3: Learners like to do activities where there are visual aids. They become motivated.

T4: My learners are motivated when I do something different from what we do during each class.

T5: My learners are motivated when doing activities, where they have to paint, or deal with colored papers.

T6: I think that group works and pair works are activities that motivate most of the learners.

T7: My learners are motivated when we all together discuss a topic they are interested in.

T8: Yes, I think that it can. My learners are more motivated when they perform dialogues.