



# Guidelines for Language Classroom Instruction<sup>1</sup>

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In "Guidelines for Language Classroom Instruction," Crookes and Chaudron review research and practice in both second and foreign language contexts. The main areas of classroom instruction described are: presentational modes and focus on form, types of activities and parameters of tasks and interaction: classroom organization, teacher control of interaction, and corrective feedback.

## I. INTRODUCTION

What goes on in the language classroom between the teacher and students is obviously the core area of information pertaining to formal second language (SL) teaching and learning. "Out-of-class" knowledge of language teaching in areas such as needs analysis, curriculum design, lesson planning, materials design, and evaluation is, of course, necessary for a truly professional operation, but so long as there is a teacher working with a group of students, the essence of classroom SL teaching resides in the nature of instruction and interaction between teachers and students.

In this chapter we identify and discuss some of the more important characteristics and principles of this interaction.<sup>2</sup> Our conception of the teacher is someone with a great number of decisions to make at every moment of classroom instruction. In some cases, research findings can guide those decisions. In others, research can inform professional judgment, but decisions must be based on experience and intuition rather than knowledge. However, decisions will be aided by a knowledge of the range of instructional alternatives available, as well as by an awareness of the cultural context and personal values of the teacher and students.

When a second language is taught, a number of major steps must be taken. First, elements of the language or its use, or skills such as learning strategies, must be brought into the classroom and presented or highlighted. The teacher and,

under certain learner-centered conditions, the students select elements of the SL in this phase.<sup>3</sup> Second, that which has been selected and presented must be learned; the teacher has to arrange matters and events to bring this about. Third, the teacher must provide knowledge of results, that is, correction or feedback, to the students.

We should not ignore that these processes take place in a social milieu, and that because of the way language functions between individuals, these processes cannot be totally separated from the social climate which develops among students and between teacher and students, though space does not permit us to address this important point here. Finally, let us note that conscientious SL teachers usually come out of a class asking themselves how the class went—in other words, engaging in a process of self-evaluation. We believe that this is a vital process for professional self-development, and one which needs to be explicitly structured into SL teachers' routines. See Murphy's chapter on reflective teaching in this volume, for a full discussion.

## 2. LANGUAGE PRESENTATION

### 2.1 Meta-Planning for Lesson Objectives

Which elements of language are undertaken depends on the objectives a teacher has in mind for the lesson. They are then the result of lesson

planning and the general syllabus for the course (see the chapters by Jensen and Nunan in this volume). Despite considerable variation, generally the first element of a lesson is the first component of the traditional "present-practice-evaluate" sequence, which constitutes many teachers' understanding of basic lesson structure.

Let us assume for present purposes that a teacher has selected a particular element of language, or aspect of language learning, to be focused on as the first major stage of a class period. There are then two types of choices to be made: those concerning the physical characteristics of the presentation, that is, materials, use of audiovisual (AV) equipment, etc.; and those concerning the deductive or inductive procedures that learners will be engaging in in order to acquire rules, items, analogies, and other aspects of the target language. The former are considered in the following section, the latter in section 2.3.

## 2.2 Modalities (Materials, AV)

While not espousing any particular approach in this chapter, we feel that many professionals recognize the importance of practice in the acquisition of any cognitive skill. There is increasing recognition<sup>4</sup> of SL learning as a process of skill acquisition (O'Malley, Chamot, and Walker 1987), which implies the importance of practice, or output, rather than mere input (cf. Pica et al. 1996; Swain and Lapkin 1995). Teachers thus need to remain aware that they are not in the classroom to fill up the time with the sound of their own voices, but to arrange matters so that their students do the talking (or writing, or listening). Particularly in EFL rather than ESL situations, class time is so valuable that we believe the teacher should move on to practice phases of a lesson as soon as possible in a manner consistent with an adequate presentation of material and the giving of clear instructions for some practice exercises.

Assuming that the instructor decides that a given teaching objective calls for some support in the way of materials, what then? The major resource is of course the textbook. In addition, other teaching aids fall into two categories

(Celce-Murcia 1979): nontechnical aids and technical aids (not counting the students themselves, who can of course play a stimulating role in the presentation stages of a lesson). The former include the chalkboard, realia, flashcards, magazine pictures, and charts. The latter include the overhead projector, audio and video recordings, CD-ROM, and Internet. Both types of aids are considered elsewhere in this book (see chapters by Brinton and Sokolik in this volume).

Despite increasing research into some media, the range of classroom and cultural contexts for TES/FL means that deciding whether or not to use AV aids is usually a matter for individual teacher judgment, supported by general considerations. Does their use in a given circumstance aid comprehension? Do they stimulate more student talk than would have otherwise occurred? Above all, does their use constitute an efficient use of class time, particularly taking into account the teacher time required to produce them or the logistics of setting up and removing any necessary equipment? This is an area in which careful teacher investigation and reporting of successes and failures in practice would benefit the profession.

Perhaps because of the complexity of the question, a surprisingly small amount of research informs teachers of how to use a textbook (but see Tomlinson 1997). For the untrained teacher, a good textbook can stand in for a syllabus and training program, while an experienced teacher can use the text as an aid, adopting some parts, adapting others (Stevick 1971), or can even dispense with it completely. The utility of the average textbook for a typical present-day ESL/EFL course is normally unquestioned (but see Allwright 1981 and O'Neill 1982 for positions on both sides of this point). Nonetheless, we urge teachers to remember that most textbooks in a given period of time are often very much alike (Ariew 1982); they are the product of the pressures of the market, as imperfectly interpreted through the publisher and materials writer, and can often run counter to legitimate educational pressures. What sells may not be what works; what works may not necessarily have a format which book publishing

companies can utilize or produce. Above all, therefore, a critical stance is called for (see Byrd's chapter in this volume).

Some general points can be made about the presentation stage of a lesson. First, the instructor is, in fact, rather free from constraints despite the various procedures suggested by the teachers' notes typically accompanying the text. Texts designed for beginning and intermediate learners still commonly present the material of each unit via a dialogue, and the teacher is often instructed to have the students work with the dialogue. In many traditional classroom settings (especially EFL settings), this involves having the class repeat the dialogue in unison, possibly moving next to partial memorization. Yet, an equally efficient procedure for some classes would be to have students pair off and read the dialogue aloud while the teacher circulates and checks individual performance. The point is that teachers have the right and responsibility to utilize the material in whatever way seems appropriate, hopefully making use of the findings that SL research suggests.

For example, an increasingly well-established line of work has stressed the role of attention and awareness in SL learning (Schmidt 1990, 1995) and the importance of drawing the learner's attention to certain characteristics of the language which might otherwise be missed (referred to as "input enhancement"; see Rutherford 1987, Doughty and Williams 1998a). It follows, therefore, that the teacher should usually present the text or illustrative material with an immediate focus on the target points. On the other hand, research over the last two decades has made clear that SL learning does not take place in a simple linear fashion with one linguistic element being added to the next. In the syntactic domain, learners proceed at different speeds through fairly regular sequences (Pienemann and Johnston 1987). It is unlikely that structural target points will be internalized by many in a class after one exposure.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the particular aspect of language to be learned should almost certainly come up on other occasions, in other lessons. The fact that SL learning involves the learning of a cognitive skill implies that the first stage of use (the

"cognitive stage") will be errorful and difficult for the learner. Movement towards automaticity will require a great deal of active, realistic practice in the use of the target language, which may not be susceptible to general error correction. Finally, at the presentation stage, it is relevant to consider what little is known about the learner's development of control over the pragmatic aspects of the SL. An emphasis on realistic, communicative language use in the classroom from an early stage is therefore justified, as is the development of the metalinguistic terms needed to talk about language use (Henriksen 1988).

As a final comment, although we have used the generally accepted term *textbook* throughout this section, it is clear that sole reliance on a textbook within the classroom is becoming less common in richer countries or more well-resourced schools. Developments in technology have made the creation and almost immediate use of in-house materials increasingly possible. The advantages of personalization and localization of materials are clear. In addition, of course, the ease of access to all kinds of supplementary resource materials and stimulus materials via the Web has helped teachers supplement textbooks while at the same time raising students' expectations.

## 2.3 Rule Presentations and Explanations

A great deal of research in the 1960s was concerned with whether and when to present explicit second language grammar rules to students (Levin 1972; see recent discussion of the issue in Borg 1999). The upshot of those studies was that explicit grammar instruction was not consistently superior in the long run to other practices. As a result, the various communicatively oriented language teaching methods and prescriptions developed after this time de-emphasized the use of explicit grammar rule presentation and even questioned the use of grammatically based materials.

However, subsequent research on second language acquisition has increasingly established the legitimacy of a focus on form (see most recently Doughty and Williams 1998a, 1998b; and

Norris and Ortega 2000), while still questioning the desirability of a persistent focus on correctness at all times in a syllabus or course of study. (These issues are dealt with in more detail in the chapters by Larsen-Freeman and Fotos in this volume.)

Based on the claims of most theorists that some focus on form can be required by learners or by a given classroom sequence, it is reasonable for teachers to be aware of options in how to make a rule explicit or not; whether or not to isolate a rule; whether an explanation should involve a deductive or inductive presentation; who should give the explanation—the teacher, the text, or another student; whether the language is abstract or not; and whether the explanation is provided orally or in writing. Teachers must ensure the clarity and sufficiency of their explanations by checking student comprehension, preferably not merely by solicitation of a “yes” or a nod.

Following the approach of Chaudron's (1982) description of teachers' vocabulary elaboration, Yee and Wagner (1984) developed a discourse model of teachers' vocabulary and grammar explanations. Their model contains several major segments (a framing stage, a focusing stage, the explanation itself, and a restatement), with several subcategories as optional features (e.g., with or without mention of the topic item, metastatements, teacher solicits of students, examples, etc.). At each stage, they point out that comprehension checks by the teacher are optional. An example of their model in a brief grammar explanation follows:

TEACHER: Can we say “these” in a tag?	<i>Focus + solicit</i>
STUDENT: You can't use the word “these” in a tag.	<i>Explanation + explicit rule</i>
TEACHER: What do we need to use?	<i>+ solicit</i>

Taking a functional approach to analysis of rules and explanations, Faerch (1986) found that a typical sequence in teacher rule presentation involved (1) a “Problem-formulation”; (2) an “Induction” with the teacher eliciting

student opinions; and (3) the teacher's “Rule-formulation”; followed optionally by (4) “Exemplification” by the teacher or students. Alert teachers will adapt this typical pattern to their circumstances, either shortening the sequence if a rule is judged to be quickly learned, or developing more student-generated ideas and interaction if the students have difficulty.

### 3. TASKS

The next major step in executing classroom lessons involves practice and “learning” of the material. In this section we will identify the primary units of classroom teaching and evaluate the components of those that most influence learning. To aid discussion and communication among teachers (as well as for the sake of comparative research), it is useful to have a set of terms to describe similar teaching procedures. Over several decades of classroom research, standard terminology for what ought to be the basic units for planning and executing lessons has been lacking. In the following sections we will utilize the words *activity* and *task*, and attempt to show how these can be more systematically classified, described, and analyzed for their contribution to instruction.

#### 3.1 Subsections of a Lesson— The Activity

Probably the most commonly used and general term for the parts of a lesson is *activity*. Most teachers will use this word in discussing their lesson plans and behaviors, although specific activities often have particular names. In much recent analysis of SL classrooms, materials, and syllabi, the term *task* has been used to discuss those less-controlled activities which produce realistic use of the SL (Crookes and Gass 1993a, 1993b). This term has also characterized certain communicative approaches<sup>6</sup> whose upsurge marks the current era of SL teaching. In fact, the widespread use of the label *task-based* has in many cases simply replaced the older term *communicative*. In discussing both controlled and freer types of classroom learning procedures, we

will utilize *activity* as a broader term; *task* will apply to a separable element of a lesson that is primarily geared to practicing language presented earlier (or otherwise learned), usually involving students working with each other, to achieve a specific objective.

It is often said that for each specific learning point, learners need to develop from more controlled and mechanical to freer and communicative behaviors. Therefore, a classification of activity types along such a continuum provides the options from which the teacher can select a given sequence within a lesson. Valcárcel et al. (1985) have developed a tentative list of activity types. We have grouped this list according to four phases of instructional sequencing in lessons (see Edelhoff 1981, p. 57): Information and Motivation (in which learners' interest, experience, and relevant language knowledge are aroused); Input/Control (in which learners are involved in deepening their understanding by close attention to detail); Focus/Working (in which individual linguistic and thematic difficulties can be isolated and examined in depth); and Transfer/Application (in which new knowledge and the learner's refined communicative abilities can be put to active use). Teachers should be familiar with each of these activity types and pay attention to the various discussions in the literature of their benefits and disadvantages.

### Information and Motivation Phase

**Warm-up:** mime, dance, song, jokes, play, etc.; the purpose is to get the students stimulated, relaxed, motivated, attentive, or otherwise engaged and ready for the classroom lesson; not necessarily related to the target language.

**Setting:** focus is on lesson topic; either verbal or nonverbal evocation of the context that is relevant to the lesson point; teacher directs attention to the upcoming topic by questioning, miming, or picture presentation, or possibly a tape recording.

**Brainstorming:** free, undirected contributions by the students and teacher on a given topic to generate multiple associations without linking them; no explicit analysis or interpretation is given by the teacher.

**Story telling:** oral presentation by the teacher of a story or an event as lengthy practice, although not necessarily lesson-based; it implies the use of extended discourse; it usually aims at maintaining attention or motivation and is often entertaining.

**A propos:** conversation and other socially oriented interaction/speech by teacher, students, or even visitors on general real-life topics; typically authentic and genuine.

### Input/Control Phase

**Organizational:** managerial structuring of lesson or class activities; includes reprimanding of students and other disciplinary action, organization of class furniture and seating, general procedures for class interaction and performance, structure and purpose of lesson, etc.

**Content explanation:** explanation of lesson content and grammar or other rules and points: phonology, grammar, lexis, sociolinguistics, or whatever is being "taught."

**Role play demonstration:** use of selected students or teacher to illustrate the procedure(s) to be applied in the following lesson segment; it includes brief illustration of language or other content to be incorporated.

**Recognition:** students identify a specific target form, function, definition, rule, or other lesson-related item, either from oral or visual data, but without producing language as a response (e.g., checking off items, drawing symbols, rearranging pictures, matching utterances with pictures, underlining significant information from a text.)

**Language modeling:** presentation of new language by the teacher through isolated sentences with the help of visuals, drawings on blackboard, realia, miming, recorded material, etc.; involves students' participation in the form of repetition, question-answer display, translation, etc.; it usually aims at checking correct pronunciation and syntax, or meaning comprehension.

**Dialogue/Narrative presentation:** reading or listening passage in the form of dialogue, narration, song, etc., for passive reception (students become familiar with the text without being asked to perform any task related to the content); it usually

implies students' listening to a tape or the teacher reading aloud while students follow with or without the text.

**Question-answer display:** controlled activity involving prompting of student responses by means of *display questions* (teacher or questioner already knows the response or has a very limited set of expectations for the appropriate response); these are distinguished from *referential questions* by means of the likelihood of the questioner knowing the response and the speaker being aware of the questioner knowing the response.

**Review:** teacher-led review of previous week/month or other period; a formal summary and assessment of students' recall and performance.

### Focus/Working Phase

**Translation:** student or teacher provides L1 or L2 translations of given text.

**Dictation:** students write down orally presented text.

**Copying:** students write down visually presented text.

**Reading aloud:** student(s) read aloud from a given text—distinguished from *dialogue presentation* in that the focus is on pronunciation and rhythm.

**Drill:** typical language activity involving fixed patterns of students and teacher responding and prompting, usually with repetition, substitution, and other mechanical alterations; typically with little meaning attached.

**Dialogue/Narrative recitation:** students recite a passage or dialogue which they have previously learned or prepared; either in unison or individually.

**Cued narrative/dialogue:** students build up a dialogue or a piece of narrative following cues from miming, cue cards, pictures, flow charts, key functional requests, or other stimuli related to narrative or dialogue (e.g., filling empty bubbles, cued dialogues, completing a dialogue or a text, discourse chains, etc.).

**Meaningful drill:** language activity involving exchange of a limited number of fixed patterns

of interaction; distinguished from *mechanical drills* in that students have to make a choice with respect to the meaning conveyed.

**Preparation:** students plan the subsequent activity (in pairs, individually, or in groups) by means of rehearsing, making notes, or simply thinking.

**Identification:** students pick out and produce/label or otherwise identify a specific target form, function, definition, or other lesson-related item.

**Game:** organized language activity that has a particular task or objective and a set of rules which involve an element of competition between players (e.g., board games, hangman, bingo, etc.); it usually implies entertainment and relaxation.

**Referential question-answer:** activity that involves prompting of responses by means of referential questions (the questioner does not know beforehand the response information); distinguished from *information exchange* in that the information obtained is not meant to achieve a task or solve a problem.

**Checking:** teacher guides the correction of students' previous activity or homework, providing feedback as an activity rather than within another activity.

**Wrap-up:** brief teacher- or student-produced summary of points or items that have been practiced or learned.

### Transfer/Application Phase

**Information transfer:** students extract information from a text (oral or written) which they apply to another mode (e.g., visual → written; oral → written, etc.); it implies some transformation of the information by filling out diagrams, graphs, answering questions, etc., while listening or reading; distinguished from *identification* in that students are expected to reinterpret the information.

**Information exchange:** activity that involves one-way or two-way communication such as information gap exercises, in which one or both parties must obtain information from the other

to achieve a goal; distinguished from *meaningful drill* in that the pattern of exchange is not limited to a fixed set or order of structures; distinguished from *information transfer* in that the information is not reinterpreted; and distinguished from *referential questions* in that obtaining the information is critical for the resolution of the task.

**Role play:** students act out specified roles and functions in a relatively free way; distinguished from *cued dialogues* by the cuing being provided only minimally at the beginning, not during, the activity.

**Report:** prepared oral exposition of students' previous work (books or stories read, project work, etc.) and elaborated on according to students' own interpretation; it can also be students' reports on information obtained from a previous activity as long as it can be considered as preparation (i.e., students report back with the help of data obtained during the activity).

**Narration:** students' lengthy exposition of something which they have seen (film, video program, event, etc.), read (news, books, etc.), or experienced (events, story, etc.); narrated in their own words and without previous preparation; distinguished from *cued narrative* because of lack of immediate stimulus.

**Discussion:** debate or other form of group discussion of specified topic, with or without specified sides/positions prearranged.

**Composition:** written development of ideas, story, dialogues, or exposition; akin to *report* but in the written mode.

**Problem solving:** students work on an activity in which a problem and some limitations on means are established; it requires cooperative action on the part of participants, in small or large groups, in order to reach a solution; only one outcome—sometimes among other possible solutions—is allowed per group.

**Drama:** planned dramatic rendition of play, skit, etc.

**Simulation:** activity that involves complex interaction between groups and individuals based on simulation of real-life actions and experiences.

## Borderline Activity

**Testing:** formal testing procedures to evaluate students' progress; considered borderline because it could be included in any phase, depending on the content to be tested.

## 3.2 Task Types and Parameters

A number of the labels from this list of activities have entered into the research and pedagogical literature on "tasks." Currently there is considerable experimental work being conducted on factors that differentiate learning tasks with respect to their parameters and their influence on learners' production in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Some of these factors are summarized in this section (see also the seminal collection of studies in Crookes and Gass 1993a, 1993b).

Below are three commonly applied definitions of tasks, falling on a continuum from the notion of "real-world" tasks to specifically focused pedagogical activities:

[a] piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward . . . examples . . . include painting a fence, dressing a child, buying a pair of shoes . . . by "task" is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between (Long 1985, p. 89).

a task is taken to be an activity in which meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome (Skehan 1996, p. 38).

the smallest unit of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language. Minimally, tasks will contain some form of data or input (this might be verbal, e.g., a dialogue or reading passage, or nonverbal, e.g., a picture

sequence). The task will also have (implicitly or explicitly) a goal and roles for teachers and learners. (Nunan 1989a, p. 5).

Almost anything can be used as the basis of a task, such as dialogues, public announcements, newspaper headlines, telephone directories, or picture strips (Nunan 1989). In many SL teaching situations, use of a variety of texts (written and spoken) is justified, since part of developing learners' skill is ensuring that they become familiar with as wide a range of text types as possible.

Current research is focusing on ways and means to establish a priori the relative complexity of tasks. This will aid task selection as well as support the development of task-based syllabuses. Robinson (2000) has recently proposed a distinction between task *complexity*, task *conditions*, and task *difficulty*, which can be compared with schemas for the analysis of task factors and dimensions proposed in earlier work, such as that of Nunan (1989), Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993), and Skehan (1996). Robinson includes in task *complexity* only those factors that affect learners' cognitive resources for attention and processing of information and therefore affect the accuracy, fluency, and complexity of their production. These characteristics are viewed as continua, with end points represented by the presence or absence ( $\pm$ ) of features:  $\pm$  few elements,  $\pm$  here-and-now reference (vs. there-and-then),  $\pm$  reasoning demands,  $\pm$  planning,  $\pm$  single task, and  $\pm$  prior knowledge. There are several studies which have demonstrated, for example, that allowing for planning in the performance of tasks leads to improvements in either accuracy, fluency, or complexity or combinations of these positive outcomes (Crookes 1989; Ortega 1999). Similarly, less complex tasks favor the more positive end of each continuum. As complexity increases, fluency and accuracy tend to drop.

What Robinson proposes as task *conditions* have often been examined in the literature with respect to their effects on amount of learner production, interaction, and feedback. Thus, "participation variables" such as open and closed tasks, one-way and two-way tasks, and convergent and

divergent tasks have been shown to have substantive effects on interaction. Some of these are discussed briefly below. Likewise, "participant variables" such as gender similarities or differences, familiarity among learners, and power relationships can have an influence on task outcomes.

Finally, Robinson makes an important distinction between those factors that can be described for specific tasks and the learner-internal factors that influence the *difficulty* that different learners will have in ability to perform on any given task. These include learners' motivation, anxiety, confidence, aptitude, level of attained proficiency in the L2, and intelligence. Skehan (1996) has also pointed out the importance of various pressures on learners (e.g., time pressures) that can affect how successfully they perform on tasks.

It is important to note that whatever approach one takes to the task analysis, it must be embedded in an analysis of the effects of task *sequencing*. That is, as suggested in the listing of activities within phases in the previous section, implementation of tasks in pedagogically rational sequences can accomplish a great deal toward ensuring learner success on a given task. Skehan's model (1996, p. 57) of task implementation, for instance, suggests ways in which pre-tasks help establish target language or reduce cognitive load through consciousness-raising or practice, and post-tasks help learners to restructure and integrate target forms or functions, increasing the integration of learning goals as further similar tasks are performed.

### 3.2.1 Relevant Characteristics

Several of the characteristics to be discussed are among the "task conditions" proposed by Robinson (2000). Although they may not affect complexity per se, they have been shown to affect the nature of the language used in tasks. The main focus of such language has been on the provision of comprehensible input as indicated by markers of interactional modification. It has been argued that language which is comprehensible to the SL learner and is at an appropriate level will



be of high utility for learning purposes, and that indicators of such discourse are those deviations from normal talk which are used to clarify misunderstandings or problems in communication (Long 1980). The role of practice in SL development has also been emphasized, and Swain (1985) has referred to this as the *output hypothesis*. This suggests that valuable task characteristics would require learners to produce more complex constructions than they would otherwise use (Crookes 1989; Duff 1986; for further discussion see Crookes 1986; Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun, 1993).

A typical task condition which was heavily investigated was "information structure", (an aspect of "information transfer" activities—see section 3.1). Information gap tasks may be designed so that each participant holds different information which must be shared verbally in order for the task to be successfully completed. Such a "two-way task" can be compared with one in which verbal information transfer is also necessary for task completion, but where the information is allocated solely to one participant, who is required to convey it to the other. Classic work of this type (Long 1980) showed that two-way tasks produced more interactional modification (repetitions, expansions, confirmation checks, etc.) than did one-way tasks for native speaker/non-native speaker (NS-NNS) dyads.

A second set of task characteristics, in a sense complementary to the one-/two-way distinction, is shared assumptions. Some studies suggest that the extensive shared background information available in some two-way tasks may work against calling forth more negotiation of meaning. It may be, as Gass and Varonis (1985) argue, that if both participants in an information-gap task have a very clear idea of the structure of one another's information, there will be less likelihood of partial or complete meaning breakdowns. Similarly, as Gaies (1982) suggests, if both participants are well acquainted with each other, they will be able to manage communication difficulties without the need for the extensive negotiation that is probably useful for language acquisition. This may also apply to the availability of visual support for a task. In an investigation of the degree to which three

different tasks produced changes in learners' interlanguages (IL), Crookes and Rulon (1988) found that of two problem-solving tasks, the one in which observable IL development was less evident was the one in which the task provided visual support to both members of the dyad. Even though the pictures used were not identical, they were versions of the same picture, differing only in certain limited features (often called "Spot the Difference").

A third feature which has been posited as likely to be relevant is recycling. If the discourse generated by a task requires the same linguistic material to be used repeatedly, such a conversation would be potentially more useful to the NNS than one in which many items occurred once only (see Gass et al. 1999).

A fourth possible factor is convergence, which derives from the work of Duff (1986). Many communicative tasks available on the ESL materials market require participants to "reach a mutually acceptable solution" (Duff 1986, p. 150), often in solving some values clarification problem. Also quite common now are materials which require students to take a stand on one side of an issue and argue their positions (e.g., Alexander, Kingsbury, and Chapman 1978). The former may be termed a "convergent task type," the latter a "divergent task type" (Duff 1986, p. 150). Duff found that convergent tasks lead to frequent exchange of turns and more communication units, whereas divergent tasks lead to longer turns of greater syntactic complexity. If convergent tasks produce more questions and shorter turns, one may assume that more comprehensible input is available in the discourse which accompanies their performance. Alternatively, if output and the role of practice are emphasized, divergent tasks may be more highly valued, although

the extended discourse (long turns) in [divergent tasks] reduces opportunities for negotiation of input . . . coupled with the greater syntactic complexity of [discussion], this reduces . . . the amount of comprehensible input available (Duff 1986, p. 170).

We hope that by being aware of the factors which have been investigated, as well as the factors for which no evidence can legitimately be claimed (despite publishers' promotional claims), teachers will find it easier to make the best possible decisions when designing or selecting SL tasks.

## 4. FACILITATION

A major role of the instructor is to arrange matters so the material presented gets used and thereby learned. This may be far more critical in the learning of a cognitive skill, in which practice assumes major dimensions, than in the learning of most school subjects, in which declarative knowledge (Anderson 1982; O'Malley, Chamot, and Walker 1987) is being presented and clear presentation may be sufficient in itself to ensure learning (cf. West 1960). We need, therefore, to give some consideration to such matters as the overall organization of the classroom, the nature and dynamics of teacher-student and student-student interaction, and the interface between these matters and the selection of classroom learning tasks.

### 4.1 Class Organization

The key participants in classroom organization are the teacher, the teacher aide or trainee, the individual student and groupings of students, the class as a whole, the language presentation materials used (e.g., textbook, AV media), and any visitors or outsiders. Combinations of these result in particular structures in class organization and effects on language learning processes.

The dominant view of second language classroom processes today favors student-centered learning instead of the traditional teacher-dominated classroom (Nunan 1988b). The teacher-dominated classroom ("teacher-fronted") is characterized by the teacher speaking most of the time, leading activities, and constantly passing judgment on student performance; in a student-centered classroom, students typically will be observed working individually or in pairs and small groups, each on distinct tasks and projects.

Learner-centered instruction has the benefits of greater individualization of learning objectives, increased student opportunities to perform using the target language (whether receptively or productively), and increased personal sense of relevance and achievement, thus relieving the teacher of the need to constantly supervise all students. Students often will pay more attention and learn better from one another since their performances and processes of negotiation of meaning are more closely adapted to one another's level of ability. Teachers should thus be prepared to develop fewer teacher-dominated activities and tasks, while remaining conscious of their students' need for guidance in setting objectives, for appropriate models of and feedback about the target language, and for constructive and supportive evaluation of their progress.

In general, the most appropriate and effective classroom organization is pair and group work. Traditional teachers still harbor negative views of the outcomes of learner-dominated activities, but a small amount of important classroom-centered research has demonstrated that when students have more opportunities to employ the target language, they manage to perform equally successfully in terms of grammatical accuracy as when the teacher is leading the discussion (Doughty and Pica 1984; Pica and Doughty 1985; cf. discussion in Chaudron 1988, pp. 151-152).

Group work has been shown to result in many advantages for SL learners (see, for example, Long et al. 1976; Pica and Doughty 1985; Pica et al. 1996): learners speak more frequently and with longer stretches of speech; they produce more interactional modifications directed at one another; and they utilize a wider range of language. An especially important effect related to cultural differences is that the observable inhibitions to speak in larger classes tend to disappear in small group work.

It should also be recognized that group work results in diversity of performance between groups. This suggests that just as individuals contribute to a group, the different groups in a classroom can be linked through different tasks, roles, and shared responsibilities to generate whole-class tasks and objectives. Although

competitive models can be employed in this way (as described in Kagan 1986), many favor whole-class cooperative learning projects.

## 4.2 Aspects of the Teacher-Fronted Class

Although we emphasize the relative productivity of the small group over the teacher-fronted class, teachers sometimes need to operate in a "lock-step" mode. We will discuss two general characteristics of teacher-student interaction which can fairly easily be manipulated under these conditions to the advantage of SL learning: question type and wait time.

### 4.2.1 Question Types

Studies (Brock 1986; Long and Sato 1983) have shown that ESL teachers' classroom questioning patterns are typically different from those used by native speakers conversing casually with adult non-native speakers. SL teachers ask more display questions (those to which the questioner already knows the answer) than do ordinary NSs talking to NNSs. The latter usually use referential questions (those to which the questioner does not already know the answer). This difference may be because teachers tend to act as if the SL were information which they must transmit to students, testing whether it has been understood by using display questions.

There are reasons to be concerned about this. First, it is generally accepted that the model of the target language provided by the teacher in the classroom should not deviate greatly from that likely to be encountered in real life. Second, if teacher-student interaction is predominantly through display questions, relatively little real communication is going on. As Long and Crookes observe,

Display questions by definition preclude students attempting to communicate new, unknown information. They tend to set the focus of the entire exchange they initiate on accuracy rather than meaning. The teacher (and usually the student) already

knows what the other is saying or trying to say, so there is no meaning left to negotiate (1987, p. 181).

Without negotiation of meaning it is questionable whether students addressed by a teacher are actually receiving useful input, in terms of appropriateness to their current level of comprehension and/or language development. Furthermore, less complex language is likely to be produced by learners who know that the teacher is only asking the question to check their knowledge, rather than really wanting a proper and complete answer to a real question.

A further distinction is relevant: closed referential questions versus open referential questions. The former are questions to which the speaker does not know the answer, but to which there is either only one or a very limited set of possible answers; the latter are questions to which the speaker does not know the answer and to which a large variety of answers are possible (see the ~~the~~ distinctions among activity types in Section 3.1). Long et al. (1984) found that open referential questions produced more complex student responses than did closed referential questions, with complexity measured by number of words per student turn.

### 4.2.2 Wait-Time

Wait-time refers to the length of the pause which follows a teacher's question to an individual student or to the whole class. This lasts until either a student answers or the teacher adds a comment or poses another question. It can also apply to the period between one student's answer to a question and the response of the teacher or another student. A number of investigations in general education have found that wait-times can be altered by teachers but tend to be short, around one second (e.g., Rowe 1969; for a review see Tobin 1987). When wait-time is increased to three to five seconds, there is improvement in learning and in the quality of classroom discourse. The principal SL study of wait-time (Long et al. 1984) found that increased wait-time after teacher questions resulted in longer SL student utterances. It did not result in more utterances

per student turn, however, which may have been due to the low proficiency level of the students in the study or possibly to an interaction between cognitive level of questions and wait-time. When asking "harder" questions, teachers tended to wait longer, but the difficulty of such questions was not always compensated for by proportionately longer wait-time. We advance the matter of wait-time here as an example of a classroom procedure which is easy to manipulate and which warrants further classroom investigation. Teachers might want to try the effects of simply waiting longer as they interact with their SL students, knowing that their findings, if communicated, could aid their colleagues and further substantiate (or perhaps disprove) the potential of increased wait-time in SL teaching.

## 5. CORRECTION AND FEEDBACK

In Section 2.3 we noted that a focus on formal aspects of the SL has again become a concern of methodologists and practitioners. Error correction and feedback have typically been considered to be part of such a focus. As Chaudron notes in his review of feedback in language teaching

In any communicative exchange, speakers derive from their listeners information on the reception and comprehension of their message. . . . From the language teacher's point of view, the provision of feedback . . . is a major means by which to inform learners of the accuracy of both their formal target language production and their other classroom behavior and knowledge. From the learners' point of view, the use of feedback in repairing their utterances, and involvement in repairing their interlocutors' utterances, may constitute the most potent source of improvement in both target language development and other subject matter knowledge (1988, pp. 132-133).

While there is no reason to associate feedback and correction solely with a formal focus, approaches to language teaching will vary in the degree to which the teacher is expected to be the source of "correcting" behavior. A traditional notion is that the teacher or materials provide a correction of every (important) learner error, while a more current view emphasizes the importance of learners obtaining feedback (and possible correction) only when the meanings they attempt to convey are not understood; even then, the feedback should be a natural outcome of the communicative interaction, often between learners. Even in the most learner-centered instruction, learners need feedback in order to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable target language use. (See the chapters by Larsen-Freeman and Fotos in this volume for further discussion.)

The provision of feedback, or even "corrections," does not mean that the information provided must be stated in formalized grammatical or other descriptive terms. The teacher has many options available, from simply indicating lack of comprehension or otherwise signaling the occurrence of an error and getting the learner to self-correct, to the most elaborate grammatical explanation and drill of correct forms.

Teachers frequently make the mistake of thinking that by providing a correct "model," by repeating student statements with some slight change in the grammatical form, learners will perceive the correction and incorporate it into their developing grammars. This is the form of feedback known as "recasts," which is a relatively implicit focus on form (see Long, Inagaki, and Ortega 1998). As Chaudron (1977) notes, and Lyster (1998a) argues further, such feedback is likely to be perceived by the learner not as a formal change, but rather as a confirmation, rephrasing, or clarification of the functional meaning. For example:

STUDENT: I can no go back home today early.

TEACHER: You can't go home early today?

STUDENT: No.

If there is in fact reason to provide formal feedback in such a case, it helps to focus on the specific correction by emphasizing and isolating

the modeled forms (Chaudron 1977): *I can't go home, or early today*. But it appears evident from studies of recasts that they are in fact effective 20-25 percent of the time. This effectiveness may be because they occur when the learner has reached a stage of grammatical competence that allows him or her to perceive the slight difference in use.

In some recent research on French language immersion classrooms in Canada, Lyster and Ranta (1997; see also Lyster 1998a, 1998b) illustrate a wide variety of feedback events, frequently in the middle of content-based exchanges. They argue that their data illustrate the positive value of explicit correction and negotiated feedback in guiding learners to the correct use of target forms, since "uptake" of correct grammatical forms occurred more frequently following such corrective moves. It should be noted that a considerably higher rate of uptake of pronunciation and lexical errors occurred in their data when the teachers provided only implicit feedback in the form of recasts.

On the other hand, such practices may be less effective than encouraging learners to self-correct (see Tomasello and Herron 1988) or having other learners assist in corrections. Peer correction has the potential advantage of being at the right level of development in the learner's interlanguage grammar.

As we noted in Section 2.3, an important limitation on the effectiveness of feedback and correction, especially with respect to grammatical development, is the natural order of acquisition of a given structure or function. Ultimately, teachers must remain current with findings of research in SL acquisition, to better understand when it might be useful to correct.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This introductory review of SL classroom teaching as an area of study and professional practice could be extended; indeed, many other chapters of this volume continue the discussion of key areas for classroom practice. Nonetheless, it is evident that teachers still encounter many areas

of ignorance where ideally there should be knowledge. On the one hand, teachers should know what relatively firm information does exist, and where there is room for investigation. This should aid their decision making. As the SL profession develops, more teachers are qualified to conduct their own research or to collaborate with researchers.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, teaching will always be a series of judgment calls; its real-time cognitive complexity means it will never be just a science, and will always remain something of an art (cf. Clark and Lampert 1986; Leinhardt and Greeno 1986). We have tried here to help the judgment calls be educated, informed ones through the teacher's combined use of knowledge and educated professional reflection.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why should ESL teachers be concerned about keeping up with the results of classroom research and second language acquisition research?
2. Do you agree that teachers should make their lesson objectives clear to their students? Can you think of situations in which this would be inappropriate? Why?
3. How much place do you think presentation, explanation, and discussion of rules for language use have in the SL classroom? What underlying view of language and language learning supports your view?
4. Discuss the ways in which one might investigate the most effective way of giving feedback (or correction). What data would you collect, and how would you identify successful correction?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Prepare (individually) and compare (as a group) a mini-lesson. Select a specific point of language form or function, rule of conversation, or other social use of English. Individually develop a sequence of activities that you might use to present, develop, and

evaluate this point, and then compare your suggestions in a group. Develop a jointly agreed-upon way of teaching this point and practice it with one another.

2. A useful alternative way of practicing the first activity is for each person to teach a point in a language unknown to the others in the group. Discuss your feelings on once again being a second language learner.
3. Working with a partner, discuss ways in which a teacher with a multicultural group of students can best maintain a positive classroom climate, promoting student interest and motivation.



## FURTHER READING

Bailey, K. M., and D. Nunan, eds. 1996. *Voices from the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An extensive and accessible collection of recent classroom SL studies, illustrating the range of current work of a more qualitative nature.

Burns, A. 1999. *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A practical introduction to teacher research in SL contexts based on actual investigations by a team of SL teachers in Australia.

Chaudron, C. 1988. *Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A comprehensive survey of earlier SL classroom research.

Crookes, G., and S. M. Gass, eds. 1993. *Tasks in a Pedagogical Context: Integrating Theory and Practice*. Philadelphia, PA: Multilingual Matters.

An illustrative collection of studies of pedagogical applications of the concept of "task" in SL teaching.

Lynch, T. 1996. *Communication in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

A useful introduction to basic processes of classroom interaction and teacher talk, with clear examples.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> We are grateful to many people named for their assistance with the previous version (Crookes and Chaudron 1991) of this paper, and we wish to continue acknowledgement of Marisol Valcárcel, Mercedes Verdú, and Julio Roca, of the Universidad de Murcia.
- <sup>2</sup> Our discussion is traditional to the extent that we will not deal with approaches to SL teaching that involve going outside the classroom (e.g., Ashworth 1985; Auerbach 1996; Fried-Booth 1986).
- <sup>3</sup> What "size" the elements are is not at issue here. That is to say, we are not concerned with whether the units presented are structural or functional, or if the language of a given pedagogical task is an unanalyzed whole.
- <sup>4</sup> Though the idea is not a new one—see, e.g., West (1960).
- <sup>5</sup> This is, of course, a problem for the syllabus designer to be aware of and to resolve by proper choice of learning targets (see Long and Crookes 1993).
- <sup>6</sup> We should point out that we deliberately avoid the word "method" here; we do not accept its general validity as a term of analysis (cf. Richards 1984).
- <sup>7</sup> This is particularly clear in the increased recognition of the importance of action research in the area of SL teaching (Burns 1999; Crookes 1993; Freeman 1998).