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978-0-521-45968-6 - Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms

Karen E. Johnson

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To Glenn

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Karen E. Johnson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| Series editor's preface | xi |
| Preface | xiii |
| Note on transcriptions | xv |
| I A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS | 1 |
| 1 Communication in second language classrooms | 3 |
| The classroom as a communication context | 4 |
| Classroom communicative competence | 5 |
| Introducing the framework | 6 |
| An overview of the framework | 9 |
| An overview of the book | 14 |
| 2 Teachers' control of the patterns of classroom communication | 16 |
| Teachers' use of language during classroom lessons | 17 |
| Teachers' frames of reference | 27 |
| Conclusion | 38 |
| 3 Students' perceptions of the patterns of classroom communication | 39 |
| Students' perceptions of classroom events | 39 |
| Students' frames of reference | 51 |
| Conclusion | 55 |
| 4 Students' knowledge and use of language | 56 |
| Students' linguistic background knowledge: learned ways of talking | 56 |
| Students' cultural background knowledge: learned ways of communicating | 59 |
| Discontinuities between the language of the home and the school | 64 |
| Maximizing students' knowledge and uses of language in the classroom | 66 |
| Conclusion | 70 |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45968-6 - Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms

Karen E. Johnson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)viii *Contents*

- 5 Students' use of language for learning and second language acquisition 72
- Students' use of language for classroom learning 73
- Students' use of language for second language acquisition 81
- Optimal classroom conditions for classroom learning and second language acquisition 87
- Conclusion 89
- II EXAMINING PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS 91
- 6 Teacher–student interaction 93
- Excerpt 6.1: Teacher-directed patterns of communication in teacher–student interaction 93
- Excerpt 6.2: Variability in the patterns of communication in teacher–student interaction 101
- Conclusion 108
- 7 Student–student interaction 111
- Student–student interaction in the classroom 111
- The structure of student–student interaction 114
- Student–student interaction in second language classrooms 116
- Conclusion 127
- 8 Community- and school-based issues and second language classrooms 129
- Community-based issues and second language classrooms 130
- The status of English in EFL instructional settings 134
- Commercial materials and second language classrooms 136
- The classroom experience 139
- Conclusion 140
- III PROMOTING COMMUNICATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS 143
- 9 Expanding the patterns of classroom communication 145
- Allowing for variability in the patterns of classroom communication 146
- Extending the patterns of classroom communication 154
- Conclusion 159

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45968-6 - Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms

Karen E. Johnson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents ix

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 10 | Classroom communicative competence | 160 |
| | Defining classroom communicative competence | 161 |
| | Establishing classroom communicative competence | 163 |
| | Extending classroom communicative competence | 167 |
| | Conclusion | 168 |
| | References | 171 |
| | Index | 185 |

Series editor's preface

The nature of classroom communication has long been a focus of research for scholars interested in the effects of classroom interaction on learning. From this research much has been discovered about classroom speech events and participation structures, the nature of teacher talk and student–teacher interaction, and the effects of cultural factors on classroom communication. Much less is known, however, about communication in second language classrooms, though this topic is of considerable interest to language teachers and teacher educators interested in the nature of effective second language teaching. Karen Johnson's book is therefore a welcome addition to the field of second language education, since it offers a comprehensive description of communication in second language classrooms, the factors which shape the nature of such communication, and ways in which patterns of communication can help develop or limit opportunities for students to use and learn a second language in classroom settings.

Using data from authentic classroom discourse, Johnson shows how teachers use language to control and direct second language classroom communication. The nature of this communication is viewed as resulting from the dynamics of teacher–student interaction and teachers' efforts to attain their instructional goals. Throughout the book, Johnson presents parallel accounts of classroom communication, examining it from both teacher and learner perspectives. She demonstrates that teachers' perceptions of the nature of language learning, of classroom activities, and of norms for classroom participation often differ from those of their students, and that these differences can be a cause of misunderstanding and a barrier to effective learning. Throughout, Johnson uses classroom data that present a fascinating and thought-provoking account of the nature of second language teaching as it actually occurs in the moment-to-moment processes of classroom interaction.

This book will be valuable both for teacher educators interested in developing more effective ways of preparing second language teachers, and for classroom teachers interested in examining their own teaching. Teachers can use the framework Johnson develops to examine interactions

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45968-6 - Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii *Series editor's preface*

in their own classrooms as well as the assumptions they bring to teaching. Both teachers and teacher educators will also find this book a useful source of strategies that can be used to promote more effective second language classroom communication.

Jack C. Richards

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45968-6 - Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms focuses on communication as the central feature in teaching and learning within second language classrooms. It examines the classroom as a unique communication context with highly regulated patterns of communicative behavior that are actively negotiated between teachers and students. It explores how and why these patterns of communication are established and maintained so that teachers can come to understand the ways in which the nature of classroom communication ultimately determines how and what second language students learn.

The conceptual framework presented in this book views the dynamics of classroom communication as being shaped by the moment-to-moment actions and interactions that occur during face-to-face communication between teachers and students, and by what resides within teachers and students that shapes, in part, how they communicate with one another in classrooms. The framework is designed to enable teachers to recognize how the patterns of communication are established and maintained in second language classrooms, the effect these patterns have on how second language students participate in classroom activities, and how their participation shapes both the ways in which they use language for learning and their opportunities for second language acquisition.

Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms provides readers with a clear account of the dynamics of classroom communication. It also provides multiple opportunities for readers to examine specific aspects of classroom communication in terms of their potential impact on student learning and second language acquisition. Finally, it illustrates ways of promoting effective patterns of classroom communicative competence.

This book would not have been possible without the insight and support of numerous students, colleagues, and friends. I am grateful to my many former M.A. TESL students whose personal and professional insights are included in this book. Their interest in and commitment to improving the quality of classroom communication has helped advance my own understandings of the ideas presented in this book. I also would like to thank

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45968-6 - Understanding Communication in Second Language Classrooms

Karen E. Johnson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)xiv *Preface*

Paula Golombek and David Shipp for their comments on the earliest drafts of this book and for providing their critical insights as practicing second language teachers. I am indebted to my colleague Donald Freeman for his incisive comments, which enabled me to clearly articulate the residual message that undergirds the conceptual framework presented in this book. I am also grateful to Patricia Dunkel and Dennis Gouran for supporting me with both time and encouragement throughout the writing of this book. A special thanks goes to Jack Richards for his personal and professional support and to Mary Vaughn, Jane Mairs, and Sandra Graham for their help in the publishing process. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my best friend and husband, Glenn, for his unwavering support and encouragement.

Karen E. Johnson

Note on transcriptions

The following conventions are used in the transcriptions of language lessons:

Italics indicates emphasis.

Ellipses (. . .) indicate pauses.

Brackets [] indicate overlapped speech.

Parentheses () indicate actions.

Unattributed quotations come from unpublished research; the names of the informants have been changed.