1 Major issues in second language classroom research

Since the 1960s, there has been an increasing attempt in research on teaching and learning from instruction to relate the major features of teacher and student behavior in classrooms to learning outcomes. There have been extensive investigations into the types and quantities of instructional and noninstructional tasks, the relative amounts of participation by the teacher and students, and the functions and forms of language in interaction. At the same time, various personality, attitudinal, cognitive, and other individual or social factors which are thought to influence observable classroom behaviors have been the object of instructional research. The fundamental goal of most such research has, of course, been to determine which variables best, or more frequently, lead to academic achievement. Careful evaluation of results can lead to well-informed decision making at all levels of educational planning: development of the curriculum, preparation of materials, training of teachers, preference for classroom teaching activities and techniques, decisions about individualization of instruction, and even teacher's modifications of speech in explanations. The range of applications of classroom-based research is broad, and the number of factors and issues studied seems endless. While second language classroom research has tended to lag behind native language research in the topics and methods for investigation, these statements apply equally to both contexts.

In addition to the intrinsic interest that the description of classroom processes has for researchers, probably the ultimate objective of classroom research is to identify those characteristics of classrooms that lead to efficient learning of the instructional content, so that empirically supported L2 teacher training and program development can be implemented. The researcher will not approach this objective with any rigid notion of the principal sources of those characteristics, for there equally as well may be other qualities of the program responsible for learning, such as materials, classroom environment, the teacher, the students, and teaching methods. On the other hand, effective research will be based on well-reasoned theory and synthesis of previous knowledge, so that these sources are not investigated randomly.

In this book second language research on teachers, learners, and the

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interaction between them will be reviewed, in order to determine the
degree to which specific classroom processes or behaviors are sources
of positive effects on second language learning. The focus on just these
factors does not, however, imply that other environmental or program-
matic influences may not contribute to learning, but rather that the
accumulating wealth of information on teacher and learner classroom
behavior is now substantial enough to warrant detailed study in its own
right.[1]

In an outline of requirements of research on teaching effectiveness,
Cooley, Leinhardt, and McGrail (1977) include measures of a) student
outcomes, b) teaching behavior, and c) other variables, as well as pro-
cedures for collecting and analyzing data, and "a model of classroom
processes for use in selecting, constructing, and organizing all these
measures" (p. 120). Although no explanatory model exists that inter-
relates all the possible variables involved in L2 classrooms, a general
model for the study of classroom teaching is outlined by Dunkin and
Biddle (1974:38). This model, shown in Figure 1.1, serves well as an
initial guide for the classification of variables and behaviors.

The research reviewed in this book deals primarily with the "process"
variables within the "classroom" box in Figure 1.1, that is, research on
the nature of teacher and student behavior in real classrooms. To the
extent that investigators have related teacher "presage" variables, stu-
dent characteristics,[2] or program types (which should be included under
"context" variables) to classroom processes, this research will also be
considered. However, description of the interaction of process variables
with one another and analysis of the relationship between process var-
iables and product variables (learning outcomes) are the main focus of
the research discussed in the book.

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1 This accumulation of research is evidenced by the publication in recent years of sev-
   eral books and anthologies of L2 classroom-oriented research, although no review
   similar to this book has been conducted. See, for example, Trueba, Guthrie and Au
   (1981), Chamberlain and Llamzon (1982), Seliger and Long (1983), Ellis (1984b),
   Gass and Madden (1985), Faerch and Kasper (1985a), Kasper (1986), Day (1986),
   Allwright and Bailey (in press), and van Lier (in press). There have also appeared
   several review articles and a bibliography on the topic (Allwright 1983; Gaies
   1983a; Mitchell 1985; Bailey 1985; Long 1985b), and numerous colloquia and
   seminars (most notably the annual Colloquium on Classroom Centered Research
   held at TESOL conventions and the RELC Regional Seminar on Patterns of Class-
   room Interaction in Southeast Asia, Singapore, 1986).
2 Dunkin and Biddle (1974) include these in "context" variables because of the lack
   of control teachers have over student characteristics; they take a teacher-focused po-
   sition with regard to the institution of change in teaching. Also, it should be noted
   that, while their model and focus was on regular school learning, the research dealt
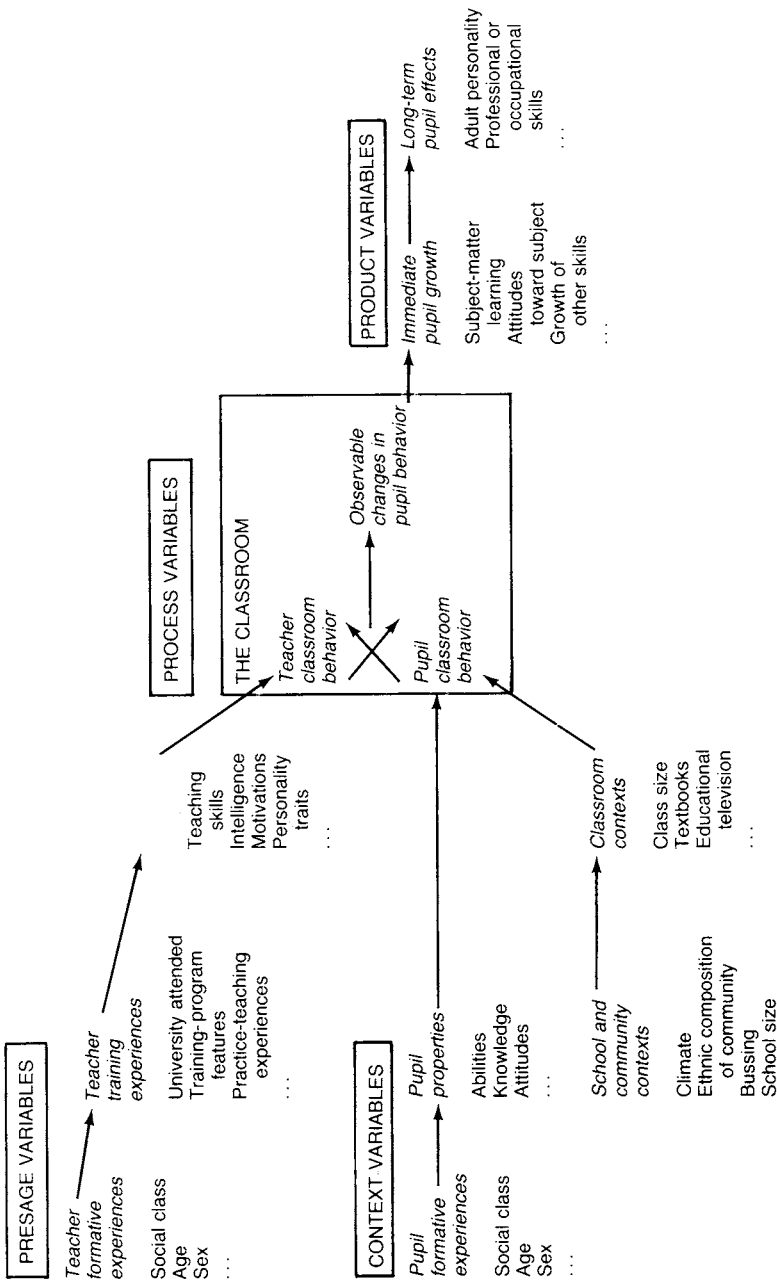   with in this book will extend these factors to child, adolescent, and adult contexts.

Figure 1.1 A model for the study of classroom teaching. (From: The Study of Teaching by Michael J. Dunkin and Bruce J. Biddle, p. 38. Copyright © 1974 by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.)

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The value of second language instruction

There are, of course, a number of theoretical issues relating to the teaching and learning of second languages, many of which will be brought out in the context of specific research studies and factors. One overriding issue in L2 research concerns the ultimate *value* of second language instruction. Does language instruction help at all? There is little reason to investigate which teaching behaviors might improve L2 learning slightly if, overall, instruction in an L2 is not especially productive. This issue hinges on the degree to which an L2 is acquired through natural development and exposure to it in meaningful, social interaction, compared to the degree to which a structured, formalistic environment (i.e., school instruction) can contribute to acquisition. Since, as most readers of this book will recognize, the average L2 learner is seldom able to engage naturally and extensively in a target language environment, because the learner either lives in another country or is isolated socially or economically from full participation with L2 speakers, the potential value of instructional access to the L2 increases by default. The question of whether L2 instruction has an *absolute* positive effect on acquisition will obviously depend on particular programs and circumstances, but in a synthesis of several studies which compared naturalistic with formal instruction, Long (1983a) argues that the outcomes favor instruction, *all other factors being equal*. In other words, instructional contexts appeared to contribute more positively to acquisition of the L2 than naturalistic exposure, when duration of exposure and other factors (e.g., age) were controlled. However, classroom-based research alone cannot answer the question regarding the absolute value of instruction, since program evaluation is ultimately required.

Yet, in regard to the *relative* effects of instruction on acquisition, the question remains open as to which features of L2 classroom instruction might contribute to different learners' development, or to development of only selected features of L2 performance. That is, some classroom processes may aid the acquisition of certain structures (e.g., vocabulary) without influencing others (syntax). By noting differential effects, classroom-oriented research can guide the teacher, researcher, curriculum developer, or administrator toward principles of effective instruction.

The context of second language instruction

Another major source of theoretical issues in L2 classroom learning concerns the *nature* of instruction that results from different learning

contexts. Most broadly, second language instruction occurs in two contexts. In one, the ''foreign language'' context, relevant to perhaps the majority of L2 learners, the learner acquires the L2 when there is little natural use of the language in the surrounding society (such as English in Japan, French in the United States, Chinese in Tanzania). As a consequence, the L2 is usually treated as equivalent to any school subject, like geography and mathematics, in which terminology, concepts, and rules are taught, homework is written, and tests are taken. Associated with the subject are of course a wide range of attitudes toward the L2 people and culture, derived in part from the learner's out-of-school exposure to, or knowledge about, the target language community.

In the second, the ''second language'' context, the L2 is not only the content of instruction but the medium of instruction, because of either programmatic decisions (as in ''immersion'' settings in which the community around the school is still a native language environment) or linguistic necessity (as in most multilingual settings). Especially in the latter case, when *only* the L2 can be used for communication, the social relationships and the curriculum content are conveyed to learners in a cultural and linguistic medium that surpasses their competence to some degree, and there is usually little recourse to L1 sources of interpretation. The learner's task is therefore threefold: first, making sense of instructional tasks posed in the L2, then attaining a sociolinguistic competence to allow greater participation, and finally learning the content itself. Attitudes may again have an influence, but the cognitive demands of communication and socialization into the L2 community are dominant.

As a result, in the second language context, teachers need to anticipate learners' needs for additional assistance in understanding both the instructional processes and the linguistic medium that conveys them. Effectively meeting learners' needs may involve modifications of the language used for management, social relations, and instruction, aside from possible methodological choices concerning materials and learning tasks. This is not to say that a second language context is inherently more difficult to manipulate than a foreign language one, but rather that there are quite different demands on the learner in the two cases. Classroom-oriented research must not only take these differences into consideration when comparing results across the contexts, but it must adopt the secondary goal of understanding the nature of the contextual demands on learners and teachers. In this way, research would derive principles for instructional decision making that are valid across contexts. In the following chapters, similarities and differences between these contexts will be noted when research studies permit comparison.

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Major issues

The following discussion briefly outlines four general issues concerning the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Later, each will be defined more thoroughly and the research basis for the major positions on them will be explored.

Learning from instruction

Perhaps the most well-known position concerning the influence of instruction on L2 development is that of Krashen. Krashen (1982:ch. V) offers an extensive analysis of the role of instruction within his framework for interpreting L2 acquisition. He views the effects of instruction as limited, however: the classroom should function to provide the learner with comprehensible target language (TL) input in an affectively supportive climate. Only insofar as the input is comprehensible, at the appropriate level just ahead of the learners' stage of rule development $(i + 1)$, will learners be able to derive support for or disconfirmation of their interlanguage rules. Given affective support, this should be sufficient for learners to progress in the TL. Instruction will especially be valuable when other naturalistic input is not available, as in foreign language instruction contexts, or when learners are at a low level of proficiency and not as likely to obtain sufficient comprehensible input in naturalistic encounters.

    In Krashen's view, instruction directed toward conscious learning of TL rules does not substantially contribute to learners' progress. Yet Long (1983a) argues that the advantage instruction has over a naturalistic acquisition context must lie in part in the experience of "treating language as object" and "learning" to control performance on a variety of L2 tasks. Krashen considers conscious learning to be limited to learning to *control* production of easy L2 rules, which still will not guarantee subsequent acquisition of such rules. Long claims, however, that such limited effects would not account for the relative success of more advanced learners in instructional settings over naturalistic acquirers. In his view, more complex rules and metalinguistic awareness would also be obtained through instruction. Many second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have investigated this issue of conscious versus unconscious rule acquisition (see Bialystok 1982 and selections in Davies, Criper, and Howatt 1984 for important summary positions on the topic), but the matter remains unresolved and in need of a precise methodology for distinguishing learners' conscious rule knowledge from unconscious performance. (For a review of research on this last topic, see Chaudron 1983c.) How teachers achieve a focus on language as object, and the

ways learners make use of such a focus, have barely been investigated in classroom research (though see Faerch 1985, 1986, and Chapter 6, this volume).

In a review of applications of SLA theory to teaching and syllabus construction, Pienemann (1985, see also Meisel, Clahsen, and Pienemann 1981, and Pienemann 1984) takes an important theoretical position on this question. He proposes that L2 learners' procession through developmental stages is determined by a few fundamental psycholinguistic "processing prerequisites," that is, cognitive operations that are ordered by their complexity. Not all TL rules are affected by these operations, so that some will vary according to affective states in the learner, exposure, and other factors. Nevertheless, that subset of rules which are developmental can be influenced by instruction – not to the extent that stages in development can be surpassed, but in the rapidity with which a learner can develop to the next stage ahead. Those TL forms which are produced by the next stage of processing prerequisites above the learner's current state are amenable to instruction. Pienemann acknowledges that the issue of conscious control by the learner of these rules through formal means is not resolved in current research, so the precise manner in which instruction can influence the learner's development is not clear. This "teachability" hypothesis is discussed by a number of subsequent papers in Hyltenstam and Pienemann (1985), and it will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Generally speaking, a learning task will usually involve 1) the acquisition of certain fundamental units or elements (e.g., words, facts, rules, concepts) and 2) their integration in functional relationships and applications by means of 3) a certain amount of production, practice, or other mental operations with those elements. (Cf. the information-processing view of L2 acquisition in McLaughlin, Rossman, and McLeod 1983.) This is not to suggest that learning takes place by following these steps in order, nor that these are the only steps involved. With the case of language acquisition as an example, the student must learn to recognize the elements (sounds, morphology, lexis) and to organize them in their syntactic combinations, according to their pragmatic functional applications. If instruction is to make a difference, the TL input (modified or not) must provide the learner with the information necessary for identifying the elements and their combinations and applications. But the learner must also operate on these fundamental aspects in order to incorporate them in a behavioral repertoire. This general view does not presuppose the exact nature of the operations involved, whether they require consciousness, active production, receptive analysis, or any other specific mental activity.

Chaudron (1985b) makes an additional critical point: from the L2 learner's point of view, the recognition of the structures in input and

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their meanings is not only necessary for the acquisition of the structures in the abstract, but, insofar as the TL is the medium of instruction (as in second language contexts), it is necessary for understanding the *content* of the instruction as information and social interaction. Similarly, learners will realize not only the cognitive need to practice with the language as a learning operation, but also the communicative need to interact and negotiate meaning to achieve successful comprehension.

   A brief point is in order concerning the relationship between teaching methods and these theoretical issues. In this book, no preconception or analysis will be made as to programmatic or methodological prescriptions for teaching. As Swaffar, Arens, and Morgan (1982) have demonstrated, teachers of supposedly different methodological persuasions in fact acknowledge quite diverse and overlapping behaviors in classroom practice (cf. discussion in Stern 1983:ch. 20–21, on language teaching methods). Moreover, it will be noted in Chapters 2 and 6 that comparison studies among methods have been highly inconclusive and have rarely involved reliable, controlled observation of the classroom behaviors supposedly accompanying the methods under investigation. For these reasons, the approach here will be to describe behaviors and processes directly on the basis of exploratory or experimental classroom-oriented studies, rather than to assume the occurrence of particular classroom behaviors as consequences of adopted materials or professed methods.

Teacher talk

Theoretical attention to comprehensible input and formal instruction has led to a substantial amount of research on L2 teacher speech, often referred to as "teacher talk." The initial approach of this research has been to describe the features of L2 teacher talk which distinguish it from speech to L2 learners in noninstructional settings. Although the sociolinguistic variability in register for instructional purposes is intrinsically interesting, the main goal of this research has been to determine what makes teacher talk an aid to learning. If input to learners must be comprehensible, what factors make teacher talk in classrooms appropriate for L2 learners' differing proficiency levels? This area of research has generally attempted to explore the nature of classroom speech and, specifically, to describe and quantify the large number of features of teacher speech which might be modified – speech rate, syntax, vocabulary, pragmatic functions, and so on. Studies of these candidates for effective input in the classroom will be reviewed here, yet only a few have been investigated with respect to their effects on learners' development.

Learner behavior

The foregoing issues also lead to research goals concerning learner behavior. Whereas in the study of teacher behavior L2 researchers have tended rather narrowly to investigate teachers' linguistic and pedagogical production, learners have been viewed in a slightly broader perspective. Not only their linguistic behavior but their learning strategies and social interactions with other learners have been the target of research. Just as in the case of teacher talk, research investigates the behaviors manifested by L2 learners in classrooms, and to what extent these are related to L2 learning outcomes.

Also, since teachers are ultimately concerned with structuring the learning environment for learners so as to favor effective outcomes, some research has addressed the question of what factors (e.g., classroom grouping or tasks) facilitate optimum learning behaviors. A further notable issue in this research concerns the degree to which learners are viewed as being in control of their own learning. That is, some researchers have placed great emphasis on finding out whether learners' own initiatives, productivity, and strategies in classroom learning are the source of learning, rather than passive absorption of the teachers' information or precise adherence to the performance of classroom activities.

Interaction in the classroom

A further issue in research concerns the influence of interaction in the classroom on L2 development. Long (1980b, 1981a, 1983b) has supplemented the strict view that comprehensible input leads to acquisition with the additional notion that native speakers' speech to nonnatives is most effective for acquisition when it contains "modified interaction." These interactive features consist of ways of negotiating comprehensibility and meaning. Long suggests, in fact, that interactive modifications are more important for acquisition than modifications of NS speech that only result in simplified TL syntax and morphology.

These NS-oriented factors promoting comprehensibility have consequences for L2 learners' participation. Ellis (1980) speculated that L2 learners obtain more practice in the TL, and are more motivated to engage in further communication when they have greater opportunities to speak (e.g., when native speakers allocate turns to them) and when they achieve successful communication. (Cf. Ellis 1984b, which adds several other features of interactive discourse which he deems to be important.) This point has been underscored in research by Swain (1985). Ellis also emphasizes the benefit of the instructional focus on formal specific elements of the TL.

A further part of the argument favoring interaction hinges on a phenomenon known as "scaffolding," which derives from cognitive psychology and L1 research, and was applied to L2 acquisition by Hatch (1978). In language acquisition studies, scaffolding refers to the provision through conversation of linguistic structures that promote a learner's recognition or production of those structures or associated forms. The import of this concept is that in various conversational or other task-related interaction, the "vertical discourse" – the sequence of turns taken with conversants – aids learners in gradually incorporating portions of sentences, lexical items, reproducing sounds, etc., in meaningful ways rather than in mechanical repetition or lengthy monologues.

As a consequence of these issues, in recent years a much greater role has been attributed to interactive features of classroom behaviors, such as turn-taking, questioning and answering, negotiation of meaning, and feedback, in contrast to a more traditional view of teaching and learning which conceptualizes classroom instruction as the conveyance of information from the knowledgeable teacher to the "empty" and passive learner. Interaction is viewed as significant because it is argued that 1) only through interaction can the learner decompose the TL structures and derive meaning from classroom events, 2) interaction gives learners the opportunities to incorporate TL structures into their own speech (the scaffolding principle), and 3) the meaningfulness for learners of classroom events of any kind, whether thought of as interactive or not, will depend on the extent to which communication has been jointly constructed between the teacher and learners (Allwright 1984; Breen 1985). While the overall meaningfulness of instruction is a difficult construct to observe and evaluate, each characteristic of interaction that is considered to promote L2 development needs to be individually investigated for its contribution to communication and learning.

Methodological problems

The fact that this book is reviewing research on the preceding issues does not guarantee that the research will provide unambiguous answers to them. For economic, social, and sometimes academic reasons (e.g., poor application of research methods), research on L2 classrooms has often been flawed, incomplete in analysis, and contradictory in outcome. These problems require sound research methodology for their solution: adequate sampling of program or class types; random sampling of teachers or students; control of independent or intervening variables (such as age, language proficiency, and educational background of learners); reliable instrumentation (such as observation schedules and measures of