Chapter 5: Observing Learning and Teaching in the Second Language Classroom

Part 2
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

This section presents some student-student interactions.

The transcripts are based on the interactions between second language learners engaged in different communicative tasks.

As in the previous section, there is a chart with each transcript where you can indicate whether certain things are happening in the interaction.

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Classroom comparisons: 
Student-student interactions

**Characteristics of input and interaction:**

Compare the two charts you have completed.

- What kinds of second language input and opportunities for interaction are available to learners in each of the environments?
- How are they different from each other?
- How are they different from the teacher-student interaction you looked at previously?
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

*Characteristics of input and interaction:*

*Communication task A*

1. **Errors:**

   There are many errors in the speech of both learners.

   This includes grammatical and pronunciation errors.

   These errors are present in several breakdowns in the learners' conversation.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

**Characteristics of input and interaction:**

2 Feedback on errors:

There is no error correction in terms of form as the learners struggle to understand each other's meaning.

The difficulty they are having in communication may serve as a kind of implicit feedback.

That is, the fact that the interlocutor does not understand may signal that there is something wrong with what they have said.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

**Characteristics of input and interaction:**

**3 Genuine questions:**

Yes, there are many genuine questions.

Naturally, Student 2 asks most of these questions because he needs to get the information from Student 1 in order to draw the picture.

Student 1 also asks some genuine questions and these are almost always to ask for clarification.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

*Characteristics of input and interaction:*

4. Display questions:

No, there are no display questions because they engaged in a real communication gap exchange.

Student 2 cannot see the picture that Student 1 possesses. Therefore, all the questions asked are real questions.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

*Characteristics of input and interaction:*

5. **Negotiation of meaning:**

Yes, indeed!

Both learners are trying hard to understand each other, even though they often fail to do so.

This involves many comprehension questions and clarification requests, as well as repetitions of each other's utterances, often with emphasis, trying to understand what the other learner has just said.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

Characteristics of input and interaction:

6. Metalinguistic comments:

None
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

Characteristics of input and interaction:

Communication task B

1. Errors:

Both learners make several grammatical errors, most notably the repeated failure to produce the reflexive form of the verb se souvenir.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

*Characteristics of input and interaction:*

2. Feedback on errors:

There is no actual error correction provided.

Neither learner is really sure what the correct form is.

Instead, there is metalinguistic reflection and discussion as they try to figure out whether they are using the correct form of the verb se souvenir.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

Characteristics of input and interaction:

3. Genuine questions:

The questions that are asked are genuine.

The content is language form, but the students are genuinely sharing information about how to complete the task.
Characteristics of input and interaction:

4. Display questions:

There are no display questions.

The students are actively collaborating to reconstruct the story and are asking real questions of each other.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

Characteristics of input and interaction:

5. Negotiation of meaning:

At this point in the interaction, the students have agreed on the content of the story.

Thus, there is more NEGOTIATION OF FORM, that is, more discussion of whether they are using the correct forms to say what they've agreed they want to say.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

Characteristics of input and interaction:

6. Metalinguistic comments:

Although they are not using words such as 'verb' or 'pronoun', the students are talking about language as they focus on trying to find the right form.
Classroom comparisons: Student-student interactions

These two transcripts of student-student interaction are very different from each other.

**Task A**
- They focus exclusively on meaning.
- They focus on trying to understand each other in order to complete the information gap activity.
- They are constantly using comprehension and clarification requests as they negotiate meaning.

**Task B**
- They focus on both form and meaning.
- They make several explicit statements about whether they are using the correct form of the reflexive verb se souvenir.
- They continually question the grammatical accuracy of their use of this form as they continue to discuss the content of the story.
In the previous activities, we have described and compared teacher-student and student-student interaction in terms of six observation categories.

Some observation schemes use many more categories.

Others focus on one category.

In the next lecture, we will review eight studies in which one particular feature of instruction has been examined.

- Four studies examine corrective feedback
- Four studies examine teachers' use of questions
Study 1: Recasts in content-based classrooms

Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta (1997) developed an observational scheme which:

- describes different types of feedback teachers give on errors

- examines student UPTAKE (how they immediately respond to the feedback)

This scheme was developed in French immersion classrooms where L2 students learn the TL via subject-matter instruction (i.e. content-based instruction).
They observed the different types of corrective feedback provided during interaction in:

- Four French immersion classrooms
- 9-11 year-old students

**Findings:**

1. Their study identified six feedback types.
Corrective feedback in the classroom

1. Explicit correction

It refers to the explicit provision of the correct form.

As the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect, using expressions like:

- 'Oh, you mean ...'
- 'You should say ...'

S1 The dog run fastly.

T 'Fastly' doesn't exist. 'Fast' does not take -ly. That's why I picked 'quickly'.
2. Recasts

They involve the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error.

They are generally *implicit* in that they are NOT introduced by 'You mean', 'Use this word', or 'You should say.'

S1  Why you don't like Marc?

T   Why don't you like Marc?

S2  I don't know, I don't like him.

Note that in this example the teacher does not seem to expect uptake from S1. It seems she is merely reformulating the question S1 has asked S2.
3. Clarification requests

They indicate to students either:

- that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher
- or that the utterance is incorrect in some way and that a repetition or a reformulation is required.

A clarification request includes:

- phrases such as 'Pardon me ...'
- a repetition of the error as in 'What do you mean by ... ?'

T How often do you wash the dishes?
S Fourteen.

T Excuse me. (Clarification request)
T Fourteen what? (Clarification request)
T Fourteen times a week? (Recast)
S Yes. Lunch and dinner.
4. Metalinguistic feedback

It contains comments, information, or questions related to the correctness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form.

- **Metalinguistic comments** generally indicate that there is an error somewhere (e.g. 'Can you find your error?').

- **Metalinguistic information** generally provides either some grammatical terminology that refers to the nature of the error (e.g. 'It's masculine') or a word definition in the case of lexical error (e.g. Eat means: Put (food) into the mouth and chew and swallow it / Feed means: give food to.)

- **Metalinguistic questions** also point to the nature of the error but attempt to elicit the information from the student (e.g. 'Is it feminine?').
4. Metalinguistic feedback (Cont.)

S  We look at the people yesterday.

T  What's the ending we put on verbs when we talk about the past?

S  e-d
Corrective feedback in the classroom

5. Elicitation

It refers to at least three techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the students:

1. Teachers elicit completion of their own utterance (e.g. 'It's a ... ').

2. Teachers use questions to elicit correct forms (e.g. 'How do we say madrasah in English?').

3. Teachers occasionally ask students to reformulate their utterance.

   S  My father cleans the plate.

   T  Excuse me, he cleans the ???

   S  Plates?
6. Repetition

It refers to the teacher's repetition of the student's erroneous utterance.

In most cases, teachers adjust their intonation so as to highlight the error.
6. Repetition (Cont.)

Example 1: The *repetition* is followed by a *recast*:

S   He's in the bathroom.

T   Bathroom? Bedroom. He's in the bedroom.

Example 2: The *repetition* is followed by *metalinguistic comment* and *explicit correction*:

S   We is ...

T   We is? But it's two people, right? You see your mistake? You see the error? When it's plural it's 'we are'.
Findings (Cont.)

2. All teachers in the content-based French immersion classes they observed used *recasts* more than any other type of feedback.

   - Recasts accounted for more than half of the total feedback provided in the four classes.

3. *Repetition of error* was the least frequent feedback type provided.

4. The other types of corrective feedback fell in between.
5. Student uptake was

- least likely to occur after *recasts*

- and more likely to occur after *clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, and repetitions*.

6. *Elicitations* and *metalinguistic feedback* not only resulted in more uptake, they were also more likely to lead to a corrected form of the original utterance.
Lyster (1998) has argued that students in content-based second language classrooms (where the emphasis is on meaning not form) are less likely to notice recasts than other forms of error correction.

In this type of instruction, students may assume that the teacher is responding to the content rather than the form of their speech.

Indeed, the double challenge of

- making the subject-matter comprehensible
- and enhancing knowledge of the second language itself within subject-matter instruction

has led Merrill Swain (1988) to conclude that 'not all content teaching is necessarily good language teaching'
Since Lyster and Ranta reported their findings, several other observation studies of the type of corrective feedback provided in second or foreign language classrooms have been carried out.

Some of them report similar results:

- that recasts are the most frequently occurring type of feedback provided by teachers
- and that they appear to go unnoticed by learners

However, others report that learners do notice recasts in the classroom.
Study 2: Recasts and private speech

Amy Ohta (2000)

She conducted a study on adult foreign language learners of Japanese.
She examined the oral language that learners addressed to themselves during classroom activities.

Procedure:

She was able to obtain this PRIVATE SPEECH by attaching microphones to individual students during classroom interaction.

The classroom interaction consisted of a focus on grammar and metalinguistic instruction.
Corrective feedback in the classroom

Findings:
1. Learners noticed recasts when they were provided by the instructor.
2. Learners were more likely to react to a recast with private speech when it was directed to another learner or to the whole class rather than when it was directed to their own errors.

Conclusion:
Recasts do get noticed in classroom interaction even if they do not lead to 'uptake from the student who originally produced the error.
Corrective feedback in the classroom

Study 3: Recasts and uptake

Presentation
Corrective feedback in the classroom

Study 4: Corrective feedback in context

Presentation
Study 5: Teachers' questions in ESL classrooms

Presentation
Study 6:

Scaffolding and display and referential questions

Presentation
Questions in the classroom

Study 8: Wait time

Presentation
Another way of observing teaching and learning in second or foreign language classrooms is to describe classroom behaviors without a set of predetermined categories.

Instead, the observer takes extensive notes of the activities, practices, and interactions between teachers and learners.

This approach to classroom observation is often referred to as ETHNOGRAPHY.

In doing ethnographic research in classrooms, the observer can either be:

- a participant in the classroom activities (e.g. as a teacher aid)
- or as a non-participant, someone who sits quietly and unobtrusively in the background, observing and recording.
Ethnographies involve qualitative studies that are much broader in scope than the studies described earlier.

Ethnographies do not only focus on learning or teaching but also on social, cultural, and political contexts and their impact on learners' cognitive, linguistic, and social development.
e.g. Martha Crago's (1992) study of Inuit children led her to argue that if children come from a culture in which silence is a respectful and effective way to learn from an adult, their second language instructor needs to know this so that the children's behavior is not misinterpreted as refusal to participate or inability to comprehend.
The following presentations provide summaries of three ethnographies carried out in second and foreign language classrooms:

- one in the South Pacific
- one in Canada
- one in Europe
Study 9: Language in the home and school

Karen Watson-Gegeo (1992)

A longitudinal study over several years

Nine families in the Solomon Islands

She explored language use practices in the home and in the school.


**Study 9: Language in the home and school (Cont.)**

**Findings:**

1. The environments in the homes were rich and stimulating for both linguistic and cognitive development.

2. Nevertheless, a large number of the children failed in school.
Findings (Cont.):

3. A detailed analysis uncovered many differences in language use and values between the home and school setting.

- There was no use of the children's first language in school.
- Their first language was replaced with a restricted and often incorrect version of English.
- Part of the children's language socialization experience at home included parents:
  - negatively portraying their experiences at school,
  - expressing fears about their children's ability to succeed
  - and raising fundamental questions about the value of school in their lives.
Conclusion:

The researcher concludes that these factors were central in contributing to the children's lack of continued cognitive and linguistic development in school.
Study 10:
Separation of L2 learners in primary schools

Presentation
Study 11: Socio-political change and foreign language classroom discourse

Presentation
Thank you