6 SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Six proposals for classroom teaching

Many theories have been proposed for the best way to learn a second language in the classroom. Even more teaching methods and materials have been developed to implement these theories. But the only way to answer the question 'What is the best way to promote language learning in classrooms?' is through research that specifically investigates relationships between teaching and learning.

In this chapter, we examine six proposals for second and foreign language teaching, provide examples from classroom interaction to illustrate how the proposals get translated into classroom practice, and discuss research findings that help to assess their effectiveness. The labels we have given these proposals are:

1 Get it right from the beginning
2 Just listen ... and read
3 Let's talk
4 Two for one
5 Teach what is teachable
6 Get it right in the end

To assess proposals for classroom practice, we need to use a range of research approaches, from large-scale quantitative to in-depth qualitative studies . As we saw in Chapter 5, quantitative research may be essentially descriptive, but it may also be experimental, involving careful control of the variables that may influence learning. The goal of quantitative research is usually to identify specific variables that may affect learning similarly in different environments and find ways of measuring these effects. These studies often involve large numbers of learners in an effort to avoid the possibility that the unusual behaviour of one or two individuals might lead to a misleading conclusion about learners in general.

Qualitative research, including ethnographies and case studies, often involves small numbers, perhaps one class or only one or two learners in that

class. The emphasis is not on what is most general but rather on a thorough understanding of what is particular about what is happening in this classroom. While quantitative and qualitative research are important in assessing theoretical proposals, ACTION RESEARCH carried out by teachers in their own classrooms, is also essential to answer specific local questions. It is hardly necessary to tell experienced teachers that what 'works' in one context may fail in another.

In this chapter we focus mainly on EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES that were designed to test hypotheses about how teaching affects second language learning. Readers are encouraged to follow up with further reading but also to explore related questions through research activities within their own teaching and learning environments.

1 Get it right from the beginning

'Get it right from the beginning' is probably the proposal that characterizes more second and foreign language instruction than any other kind. Although communicative language teaching has come to dominate in some environments, the structure based approaches discussed in Chapter 5, especially grammar translation, remain widespread.

The grammar translation approach has its origin in the teaching of classical languages (for example, Greek and Latin). Students were presented with vocabulary lists, often accompanied by translation equivalents, and grammar rules. The original purpose of this approach was to help students read literature rather than to develop fluency in the spoken language. It was also thought that this approach provided students with good mental exercise to help develop their intellectual and academic abilities.

In a typical activity, students read a text together line by line and are asked to translate it from the target language into their native language. Students may answer comprehension questions based on the passage, often in their first language. The teacher draws attention to a specific grammar rule that is illustrated by the text (for example, a certain verb form). Following this, the students are given an exercise in which they are asked to practise the grammatical rule by filling in the blanks with the appropriate verb form in a series of sentences that may or may not be related to the text they have read and translated.

Audiolingual instruction arose in part as a reaction to the grammar translation approach. The argument was that, unlike grammar translation teaching in which students learned about the language, audiolingual teaching would lead students to actually speak the language (Brooks 1960; Lado 1964). In Chapter 2, we saw that the audiolingual approach was based on behaviourism and contrastive analysis. The examples below reflect

audiolingual teaching. It is evident that, even though the emphasis is on the oral language, students rarely use the language spontaneously. Teachers avoid letting beginning learners speak freely because this would allow them to make errors. The errors, it is said, could become habits. So it is better to prevent these bad habits before they happen.

Example 1
(A group of fifteen-year-old students involved in an exercise based on the simple present of English verbs.)

S1	And uh, in the afternoon, uh, I come home and uh, uh, I uh, washing my dog.
T	I wash.
S1	My dog.
T	Every day you wash your dog?
S1	No. [ben]
S2	*Il n'a pas de chien!* (= He doesn't have a dog!)
S1	*Non, mais on peut le dire!* (= No, but we can say we do!)

Clearly, in this case, the student's real experience with his dog (or even the fact that he did or did not have a dog) was irrelevant. What mattered was the correct use of the simple present verb!

Example 2
(A group of twelve-year-old learners of English as a foreign language.)

T	Repeat after me. Is there any butter in the refrigerator?
Class	Is there any butter in the refrigerator?
T	There's very little, Mom.
Class	There's very little, Mom.
T	Are there any tomatoes in the refrigerator?
Class	Are there any tomatoes in the refrigerator?
T	There are very few, Mom.
Class	There are very few, Mom. (etc.)

Pure repetition. The students have no reason to get involved or to think about what they are saying. Indeed, some students who have no idea what the sentences mean will successfully repeat them anyway, while their minds wander off to other things.

Research findings

Many adult learners, especially those with good metalinguistic knowledge of their own language, express a preference for structure-based approaches. Learners whose previous language learning experience was in grammar translation classes may also prefer such instruction. As we saw in Chapter 3, learners' beliefs about the kind of instruction that is best can influence their satisfaction and success. The grammar translation approach is useful for the
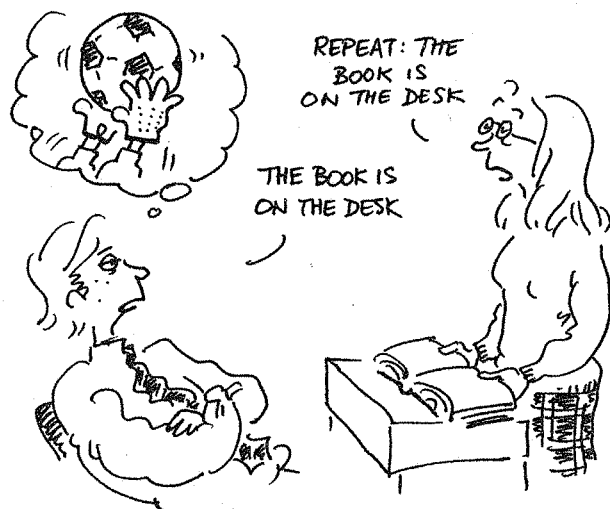
intensive study of grammar and vocabulary and is valuable for understanding important cultural texts. The audiolingual approach with its emphasis on speaking and listening was used successfully with highly motivated adult learners in training programmes for government personnel in the United States. However, there is little classroom research to support such approaches for students in ordinary school programmes that must serve the needs of students who bring different levels of motivation and aptitude to the classroom. In fact, it was the frequent failure of traditional grammar translation and audiolingual methods to produce fluency and accuracy in second language learners that led to the development of more communicative approaches to teaching in the first place.

Supporters of communicative language teaching have argued that language is not learned by the gradual accumulation of one item after another. They suggest that errors are a natural and valuable part of the language learning process. Furthermore, they believe that the motivation of learners is often stifled by an insistence on correctness in the earliest stages of second language learning. These opponents of the 'Get it right from the beginning' proposal argue that it is better to encourage learners to develop 'fluency' before 'accuracy'.

Some researchers and educators have reacted to the version of communicative language teaching that advocates an exclusive focus on meaning. They argue that allowing learners too much 'freedom' without correction and explicit instruction will lead to early fossilization of errors. Once again we hear the call for making sure that learners 'get it right from the beginning'.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to test the hypothesis that a primary emphasis on form in the early stages of second language learning will, in the long run, lead to better results than those achieved when the primary emphasis is on meaning in the early stages. To test that hypothesis, it would be necessary to compare groups that are similar in all respects except for the type of instruction they receive. However, it is not easy for researchers to find proper comparison groups. On the one hand, there are many parts of the world where one finds only structure-based approaches to language teaching, with their emphasis on learning metalinguistic information and performing accurately from the beginning. In these settings, there are no classrooms where the teaching places the primary emphasis on meaning in the early stages of learning. On the other hand, the widespread adoption of communicative language teaching in recent years has meant that, in other parts of the world, it is very difficult to make comparisons with classrooms that are primarily form-oriented because such classes simply do not exist. None the less, some findings from second language classroom research do permit us to assess the effect of instruction that is strongly oriented to the 'Get it right from the beginning' approach. These include descriptive studies of the interlanguage development of second language learners in audiolingual programmes (Study 12), and comparisons of the development of second language proficiency between groups of students receiving different combinations of form- and MEANING-BASED INSTRUCTION (Study 13).

Study 12: Audiolingual pattern drill

In the late 1970s, Patsy Lightbown (1983a, b) carried out a series of longitudinal and cross-sectional investigations into the effect of audiolingual instruction on interlanguage development. The investigations focused on French-speaking learners aged 11–16 in Quebec, Canada. Students in these programmes typically participated in the types of rote repetition and pattern practice drill we saw in Examples 1 and 2.

The learners' acquisition of certain English grammatical morphemes (for example, plural *-s* and the progressive *-ing*) was compared with the 'natural order' of acquisition observed in the interlanguage of uninstructed second language learners (see Chapter 4). The results showed differences between the 'natural order' and the relative accuracy with which these classroom learners produced them. These findings suggested that the type of instruction students had experienced—a regular diet of isolated pattern practice drills—resulted in a developmental sequence that was different from that of learners in more natural learning environments. For a time after their instruction had focused on it, learners reliably produced a particular grammatical morpheme in its obligatory contexts. For example, after weeks of drilling on present progressive, students usually supplied both the auxiliary *be* and the *-ing* ending (for example, 'He's playing ball'). However, they also produced one or more of the morphemes in places where they did

not belong ('He's want a cookie'). The same forms were produced with considerably less accuracy in obligatory contexts when they were no longer being practised in class and when the third person singular simple present -*s* was being drilled instead. At this point, many students appeared to revert to what looked like a developmentally earlier stage, using no tense marking at all (for example, 'He play ball'). These findings provided evidence that an almost exclusive focus on accuracy and practice of particular grammatical forms does not mean that learners will be able to use the forms correctly outside the classroom drill setting, nor that they will continue to use them correctly once other forms are introduced. Not surprisingly, this instruction, that depended on repetition and drill of decontextualized sentences—did not seem to favour the development of comprehension, fluency, or communicative abilities either.

Study 13: Grammar plus communicative practice

In one of the earliest experimental studies of communicative language teaching, Sandra Savignon (1972) studied the linguistic and communicative skills of forty-eight college students enrolled in French language courses at an American university. The students were divided into three groups: a 'communicative' group, a 'culture' group, and a CONTROL GROUP. All groups received about four hours per week of audiolingual instruction where the focus was on the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms. In addition, each group had a special hour of different activities. The 'communicative' group had one hour per week devoted to communicative tasks in an effort to encourage practice in using French in meaningful, creative, and spontaneous ways. The 'culture' group had an hour devoted to activities, conducted in English, designed to 'foster an awareness of the French language and culture through films, music, and art'. The control group had an hour in the language laboratory doing grammar and pronunciation drills similar to those they did in their regular class periods.

Tests to measure learners' linguistic and communicative abilities were administered before and after instruction. The tests of linguistic competence included a variety of grammar tests, teachers' evaluations of speaking skills, and course grades. The tests of communicative competence included measures of fluency and of the ability to understand and transmit information in a variety of tasks, which included: discussion with a native speaker of French, interviewing a native speaker of French, reporting facts about oneself or one's recent activities, and describing ongoing activities.

At the end of the period of instruction, there were no SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES between groups on the linguistic competence measures. However, the communicative group scored significantly higher than the other two groups on the four communicative tests developed for the study. Savignon interpreted these results as support for the argument that second

language programmes that focus only on accuracy and form do not give students sufficient opportunity to develop communication abilities in a second language. Even more important in the context of the 'Get it right from the beginning' approach was the evidence that opportunities for freer communication did not cause learners to do less well on measures of linguistic accuracy.

Interpreting the research

The studies reviewed above provide evidence to support the intuitions of teachers and learners that instruction based on the 'Get it right from the beginning' proposal has important limitations. Learners receiving audio-lingual or grammar-translation instruction are often unable to communicate their messages and intentions effectively in a second language. Experience has also shown that primarily or exclusively structure-based approaches to teaching do not guarantee that learners develop high levels of accuracy and linguistic knowledge. In fact, it is often very difficult to determine what students know about the target language. The classroom emphasis on accuracy often leads learners to feel inhibited and reluctant to take chances in using their knowledge for communication. The results from these studies provide evidence that learners benefit from opportunities for communicative practice in contexts where the emphasis is on understanding and expressing meaning.

It is important to emphasize that in the Savignon study, all students continued to receive their regular, grammar-focused instruction. They differed only in terms of the presence or absence of an additional communicative practice component. In other words, this study offers support for the hypothesis that meaning-based instruction is advantageous, not that form-based instruction is not. The contributions of communicative practice and grammar-focused instruction will be discussed in more detail in relation to the 'Get it right in the end' proposal.

2 Just listen ... and read

This proposal is based on the hypothesis that language acquisition takes place when learners are exposed to comprehensible input through listening and/or reading. As noted in Chapter 2, the individual whose name is most closely associated with this proposal is Stephen Krashen (1985, 1989). Read Example 3 to get a feel for how this theory of classroom second language learning can be implemented. Krashen's hypothesis that the one essential requirement for second language acquisition is the availability of comprehensible input is explored in the instructional setting described here.

Example 3
It is time for English class at a primary school in a French-speaking community in New Brunswick, Canada. The classroom looks like a miniature language lab, with about thirty small desks, on each of which there is a cassette player and a set of large earphones. Around the room, shelves and racks display scores of books. Each book is packaged with an audiocassette that contains a recording of its content. The materials are not strictly graded, but some sets of books are very simple, and other sets are grouped so that they are gradually more challenging. There are pre-school children's books with a picture and a word or two on each page; illustrated stories with a few sentences per page; picture dictionaries; ESL textbooks for children; illustrated science books about animals, weather, vehicles, etc. Students (aged 8–10) enter the classroom, select the material they want, and take it to their individual workspace. They insert the cassette, put on their earphones, and open their books. They hear and read English for the next thirty minutes. For some of the time the teacher walks around the classroom, checking that the machines are running smoothly, but she does not interact with the students concerning what they are doing. Some of the students are listening with closed eyes; others read actively, mouthing the words silently as they follow each line with a finger. The classroom is almost silent except for the sound of tapes being inserted and removed or chairs scraping as students go to the shelves to select new tapes and books.

'Just listen … and read' is a controversial proposal for second language teaching. It not only says that second language learners need not drill and practise language in order to learn it, but also that they do not need to speak at all, except to get other people to provide input by speaking to them. According to this view, it is enough to hear and understand the target language. The classroom description above shows that one way to do this is to provide learners with a steady diet of listening and reading comprehension activities with no (or very few) opportunities to speak or interact with the teacher or other learners in the classroom.

Research findings
Research relevant to this proposal includes studies of comprehension-based teaching and extensive reading. We will also look at some comprehension-based instruction in which the input is manipulated in ways that are intended to increase the likelihood that students will pay attention to language form as well as meaning.

Study 14: Comprehension-based instruction for children
Example 3 was a description of a real programme implemented in experimental classes in a French-speaking region in Canada. From the beginning of their ESL instruction at age eight, students only listened and read during their daily thirty-minute ESL period. There was no oral practice

or interaction in English at all. Teachers did not 'teach' but provided organizational and technical support. Thus, learners received native-speaker input from tapes and books but had virtually no interaction in English with the teacher or other learners. They guessed at meaning by using the pictures or by recognizing cognate words that are similar in French and English. Occasionally they could refer to translation equivalents of a few words, taped inside a book's back cover.

Patsy Lightbown and her colleagues (2002) investigated the second language development of hundreds of children in this comprehension-based programme and compared their learning with that of students in the regular ESL programme, which was mainly an audiolingual approach. All the students in both programmes had had classes that lasted thirty minutes per day since they started their ESL instruction. After two years, learners in the comprehension-based programme knew as much English as (and in some cases more than) learners in the regular program. This was true not only for comprehension but also for speaking, even though the learners in the experimental programme had never practised spoken English in their classes.

Lightbown and her colleagues reassessed the students' English language abilities three years later, when they were in grade 8. Some students had continued in the comprehension-only programme throughout that time. On comprehension measures and on some measures of oral production, they continued to perform as well as students in the regular programme. On other measures, some groups of students in the regular programme had made greater progress, especially in writing. Those students were in classes where the regular programme included not only audiolingual instruction but also other speaking and writing components, teacher feedback, and classroom interaction.

Study 15: Reading for words
Finding reading material for primary school students learning a second language is challenging. Finding reading material for adults in early stages of second language acquisition is challenging too, but graded readers specially designed for adult ESL learners are increasingly available. These simplified literary classics, biographies, romances, and thrillers offer interesting and age-appropriate content, while the vocabulary and writing style remain simple. Marlise Horst (2005) used simplified readers in a study of vocabulary development among adult immigrants who were enrolled in an ESL programme in a community centre in Montreal, Canada. The twenty-one participants represented several language backgrounds and proficiency levels. In addition to the activities of their regular ESL class, students chose simplified readers that were made available in a class library. Over a six-week period, students took books home and read them on their own. Horst

developed individualized vocabulary measures so that learning could be assessed in terms of the books each student actually read. She found that there was vocabulary growth attributable to reading, even over this short period. Furthermore, the study's findings suggested that the more students read, the more words they learned. She concluded that substantial vocabulary growth through reading is possible, but that students must read a great deal (more than just one or two books per semester) to realize those benefits. As we saw in Chapter 4, when we interact in ordinary conversations, we tend to use mainly the 1,000 or 2,000 most frequent words. Thus, reading is a particularly valuable source of new vocabulary. Students who have reached an intermediate level of proficiency may have few opportunities to learn new words in everyday conversation. It is in reading a variety of texts that students are most likely to encounter new vocabulary. The benefit of simplified readers is that students are likely to encounter a reasonable number of new words. This increases the likelihood that they can figure out the meaning of new words (or perhaps be motivated to look them up). If the new words occur often enough, students may remember them when they encounter them in a new context.

Study 16: Total physical response

One of the best-known variations on the 'Just listen … and read' proposal is the second language teaching approach called 'Total Physical Response' (TPR), developed by James Asher (1972). In TPR classes, students—children or adults—participate in activities in which they hear a series of commands in the target language, for example, 'stand up', 'put the book on the table', 'walk to the door'. At a more advanced level, they may act out skits as the teacher provides a description of an event or encounter. For a substantial number of hours of instruction, students are not required to say anything. They simply listen and show their comprehension by their actions. When students begin to speak, they take over the role of the teacher and give commands as well as following them. Although Krashen has expressed his enthusiasm for this approach to teaching, it differs from his comprehensible input hypothesis in one important way. The comprehensible input hypothesis suggests that no structural grading is necessary but that teachers should modify their speech as needed to ensure students' comprehension. In TPR instruction, the vocabulary and structures learners are exposed to are carefully graded and organized. The material gradually increases in complexity so that each new lesson builds on the ones before.

Asher's research showed that students could develop quite advanced levels of comprehension in the language without engaging in oral practice. It is clear that there are limitations to the kind of language students learn to produce in such an environment. Nevertheless, Asher's research shows that, for beginners, this kind of active listening gives learners a good start. It allows them to build up a considerable knowledge of the new language without

feeling the nervousness that often accompanies the first attempts to speak it.

Other research that explores the 'Just listen … and read' position includes 'input flood', 'enhanced input', and 'processing instruction' studies. In these studies, efforts have been made to draw second language learners' attention to language forms in different ways, for example, providing high-frequency exposure to specific language features, enhancing the features in some way, and/or providing explicit instruction. The emphasis in all cases, however, is on getting the learners to notice language forms in the input, not on getting them to practise producing the forms. The next two studies are examples of this research.

Study 17: Input flood

Martha Trahey and Lydia White (1993) carried out a study with young French-speaking learners (aged 10–12) in INTENSIVE ESL classes in Quebec. These students were in ESL classes in which instruction was communicative and task-based. The goal of this research was to determine whether high-frequency exposure to a particular form in the instructional input would lead to better knowledge and use of that form by the students. The linguistic form investigated was adverb placement in English (see Chapter 4). For approximately ten hours over a two-week period, learners read a series of short texts in which they were exposed to literally hundreds of instances of adverbs in English sentences—so many that the investigators referred to this study as an 'input flood'. There was no teaching of adverb placement, nor was any error correction provided. Instead, students simply read the passages and completed a variety of comprehension activities based on them.

Although learners benefited from this exposure to sentences with adverbs in all the correct positions, their learning was incomplete. They improved in their acceptance of sentences with word order that is grammatical in English but not in French ('The children quickly leave school'). However, they continued to accept sentences that are grammatical in French but not in English ('The children leave quickly school'). The students' inability to recognize that adverbs in this position are ungrammatical in English suggests that the input flood could help them add something new to their interlanguage, but did not lead them to get rid of an error based on their first language. As noted in Chapter 2, Lydia White (1991) argued that although exposure to language input may provide learners with positive evidence (information about what is grammatical in the second language), it fails to give them negative evidence (information about what is not grammatical). Positive evidence is not enough to permit learners to notice the absence in the target language of elements that are present in their interlanguage (and their first language). Thus, more explicit information about what is not

grammatical in the second language may be necessary for learners' continued development. This is discussed in more detail in the section 'Get it right in the end'.

Study 18: Enhanced input

Michael Sharwood Smith (1993) coined the term 'input enhancement' to refer to a variety of things that might draw learners' attention to features in the second language, thus increasing the chances that they would be learned. In a study involving enhanced input, Joanna White (1998) examined the acquisition of possessive determiners (specifically 'his' and 'her'; see Chapter 4) by French-speaking learners in intensive ESL classes aged 11–12. Students received approximately ten hours of exposure to hundreds of possessive determiners through a package of reading materials and comprehension activities provided over a two-week period. The major difference between this study and Trahey and White's input flood is that typographical enhancement was added. That is, every time a possessive determiner appeared in the texts, it was in bold type, underlined, italicized, or written in capital letters. The hypothesis was that this would lead the learners to notice the possessive determiners as they read the texts.

White compared the performance of learners who had read the typographically enhanced passages with that of learners who read the same texts without enhancement. She found that both groups improved in their knowledge and use of these forms but that there was little difference between them. In interpreting these findings, White questions whether the enhancement was sufficiently explicit to draw the learners' attention to possessive determiners. That is, even though the two forms were highlighted by the use of bold type, capital letters, etc., students did not learn how to choose the possessive determiner to match the gender of the possessor. In subsequent research, White found that learners made more progress when they were given a simple rule and then worked together to find the correct form to complete stories that had blanks where the possessive determiners belonged (Spada, Lightbown, and White 2005).

Study 19: Processing instruction

In a series of studies, Bill VanPatten (2004) and his colleagues have investigated the effects of PROCESSING INSTRUCTION, another approach to comprehension-based learning. In processing instruction, learners are put in situations where they cannot comprehend a sentence by depending solely on context, prior knowledge, or other clues. Rather they must focus on the language itself. In one of the first studies, adult learners of Spanish as a foreign language received instruction on different linguistic forms, for example, object pronouns (VanPatten and Cadierno 1993). As noted in Chapter 2, VanPatten found that English-speaking learners of Spanish tended to treat the object pronouns, which precede the verb in Spanish, as if
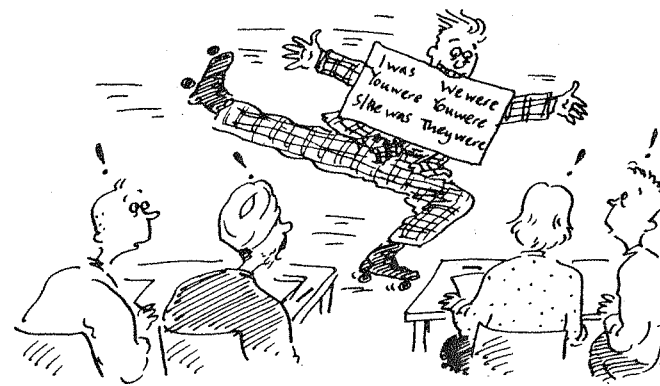
Enhancing the input

they were subject pronouns. Thus, a sentence such as *La sigue el señor* (literally 'her (object) follows the man (subject)') was interpreted as 'She follows the man'. Two groups were compared in the study, one receiving processing instruction, the other following a more traditional approach. The processing instruction group received explicit explanations about object pronouns and did some activities that drew their attention to the importance of noticing that object pronouns could occur before the verb. Then, through a variety of focused listening and reading exercises, learners had to pay attention to how the target forms were used in order to understand the meaning. For example, they heard or read *La sigue el señor* and had to choose which picture—a man following a woman or a woman following a man— corresponded to the sentence. A second group of learners also received explicit information about the target forms but instead of focusing on comprehension practice through processing instruction, they engaged in production practice, doing exercises to practise the forms being taught. After the instruction, learners who had received the comprehension-based processing instruction not only did better on the comprehension tasks than learners in the production group, they also performed as well on production tasks.

Interpreting the research

Research on comprehension-based approaches to second language acquisition shows that learners can make considerable progress if they have sustained exposure to language they understand. The evidence also suggests, however, that comprehension-based learning may best be seen as an excellent way to begin learning and as a valuable supplement to other kinds of learning for more advanced learners.

Comprehension of meaningful language is the foundation of language acquisition. Active listening, TPR, and reading for meaning are valuable components of classroom teachers' pedagogical practices. Nevertheless, considerable research and experience challenge the hypothesis that comprehensible input is enough. VanPatten's research showed that forcing students to rely on specific linguistic features in order to interpret meaning increased the chances that they would be able to use these features in their own second language production. Another response to the comprehensible input hypothesis is Merrill Swain's (1985) 'comprehensible output hypothesis'. She argued that it is when students have to produce language that they begin to see the limitations of their interlanguage (see Chapter 2). However, as we will see in the discussion of the 'Let's talk' proposal, if learners are in situations where their teachers and classmates understand them without difficulty, they may need additional help in overcoming those limitations.

3 Let's talk

Advocates of 'Let's talk' emphasize the importance of access to both comprehensible input and conversational interactions with teachers and other students. They argue that when learners are given the opportunity to engage in interaction, they are compelled to 'negotiate for meaning', that is, to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc., in a way that permits them to arrive at mutual understanding. This is especially true when the learners are working together to accomplish a particular goal, for example in TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION. According to the interaction hypothesis, the negotiation leads learners to acquire the language forms— the words and the grammatical structures—that carry the meaning they are attending to. This is the theoretical view underlying the teacher–student behaviour in the transcript from Classroom B and from the student–student interaction in Communication task A in Chapter 5.

Negotiation of meaning is accomplished through a variety of modifications that naturally arise in interaction, such as requests for clarification or confirmation, repetition with a questioning intonation, etc.

Look for negotiation of meaning in the examples below and compare this with the examples given for the 'Get it right from the beginning' proposal.

Example 4
(A group of twelve-year old ESL students are discussing a questionnaire about pets with their teacher.)

    S And what is 'feed'?
    T Feed? To feed the dog?

    S Yes, but when I don't have a ...
    T If you don't have a dog, you skip the question.

Example 5
(Students from Classroom B, as they settle in at the beginning of the day.)

    T How are you doing this morning?
    S1 I'm mad!
    S2 Why?
    T Oh boy. Yeah, why?
    S1 Because this morning, my father say no have job this morning.
    T Your father has no more job this morning? Or you have no job?
    S1 My father.

How different these examples are from the essentially meaningless interaction often observed in classrooms where the emphasis is on 'getting it right from the beginning'. Such genuine exchanges of information must surely enhance students' motivation to participate in language learning activities. But do they, as advocates of this position claim, lead to successful language acquisition? Note, for example, that, although the conversation proceeded in a natural way, the student in Example 4 never did find out what 'feed' meant.

Research findings

Most of the early research that examined the 'Let's talk' proposal was descriptive in nature, focusing on such issues as: How does negotiation in classrooms differ from that observed in natural settings? How do teacher-centred and student-centred classrooms differ in terms of conversational interaction? Do task types contribute to different kinds of interactional modifications? Several studies also examined relationships between modifications in conversational interaction and comprehension.

In the mid-1990s researchers began to directly explore the effects of interaction on second language production and development over time. Most of these studies have been carried out in laboratory settings and are motivated by Michael Long's (1996) updated version of the interaction hypothesis (see Chapter 3). Compared with the original version (Long 1983) stating that conversational interaction promotes second language development, the updated version integrates learner capacities that contribute to second language learning (for example, attention) and features of interaction that are most likely to facilitate learning. Corrective feedback has been identified as one feature that is believed to play a crucial role in helping learners make connections between form and meaning. In fact, as we will see later in this chapter, research relevant to the updated interaction hypothesis is more in line with the 'Get it right in the end' position.

Study 20: Learners talking to learners

In one of the early descriptive studies on learner interaction, Michael Long and Patricia Porter (1985) examined the language produced by adult learners performing a task in pairs. There were eighteen participants: twelve non-native speakers of English whose first language was Spanish, and six native English speakers. The non-native speakers were intermediate or advanced learners of English.

Each individual participated in separate discussions with a speaker from each of the three levels. For example, an intermediate-level speaker had a conversation with another intermediate-level speaker, another with an advanced-level speaker, and another with a native speaker of English. Long and Porter compared the speech of native and non-native speakers in conversations, analysing the differences across proficiency levels in conversation pairs. They found that learners talked more with other learners than they did with native speakers. Also, learners produced more talk with advanced-level learners than with intermediate-level partners, partly because the conversations with advanced learners lasted longer.

Long and Porter examined the number of grammatical and vocabulary errors and false starts and found that learner speech showed no differences across contexts. That is, intermediate-level learners did not make any more errors with another intermediate-level speaker than they did with an advanced or native speaker. This was an interesting result because it called into question the argument that learners need to be exposed to a native-speaking model (i.e. teacher) at all times if we are to ensure that they produce fewer errors. Overall, Long and Porter concluded that although learners cannot always provide each other with the accurate grammatical input, they can offer each other genuine communicative practice that includes negotiation of meaning. Supporters of the 'Let's talk' proposal argue that it is precisely this negotiation of meaning that is essential for language acquisition.

Study 21: Learner language and proficiency level

George Yule and Doris Macdonald (1990) investigated whether the role that different-level learners play in a two-way communication task led to differences in their interactive behaviour. They set up a task that required two learners to communicate information about the location of different buildings on a map and the route to get there. One learner, referred to as the 'sender', had a map with a delivery route on it, and this speaker's job was to describe the delivery route to the 'receiver' so that he or she could draw the delivery route on a similar map. The task was made more challenging by the fact that there were minor differences between the two maps.

To determine whether there would be any difference in the nature of the interactions according to the relative proficiency of the forty adult participants, different types of learners were paired together. One group

consisted of high-proficiency learners in the 'sender' role and low-proficiency learners in the 'receiver' role. Another group had low-proficiency 'senders' paired with high-proficiency 'receivers'.

When low-proficiency learners were in the 'sender' role, interactions were considerably longer and more varied than when high-proficiency learners were the 'senders'. The explanation for this was that high-proficiency 'senders' tended to act as if the lower-level 'receiver' had very little contribution to make in the completion of the task. As a result, the lower-level 'receivers' were almost forced to play a very passive role and said very little in order to complete the task. When lower-level learners were in the 'sender' role, however, much more negotiation of meaning and a greater variety of interactions between the two speakers took place. Based on these findings, Yule and Macdonald suggest that teachers should sometimes place more advanced students in less dominant roles in paired activities with lower-level learners.

Study 22: The dynamics of pair work

In a longitudinal study with adult ESL learners in Australia, Naomi Storch (2002) investigated the patterns of pair interaction over time and whether differences in the nature of the interactions led to differences in second language learning. Within her data, she identified four distinct patterns of interaction. 'Collaborative' interaction consisted of two learners fully engaged with each other's ideas; 'dominant–dominant' interaction was characterized by an unwillingness on the part of either learner to engage and/or agree with the other's contributions; 'dominant–passive' consisted of one learner who was authoritarian and another who was willing to yield to the other speaker; and 'expert–novice' interaction consisted of one learner who was stronger than the other but actively encouraged and supported the other in carrying out the task. To investigate whether different types of interaction led to different learning outcomes, she identified learning opportunities that arose during the interactions. Then she examined whether that language knowledge was maintained in a subsequent task. Storch found that learners who participated in the collaborative and expert–novice pairs maintained more of their second language knowledge over time. Learners who participated in the dominant–dominant and dominant–passive pairs maintained the least. Storch interprets this as support for Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development and the claim that when pair work functions collaboratively and learners are in an expert–novice relationship, they can successfully engage in the co-construction of knowledge.

Study 23: Interaction and second language development

Alison Mackey (1999) asked adult learners of ESL to engage in different communicative tasks with native speakers of the target language. The tasks were designed to provide contexts for learners to produce question forms.

Group 1 learners interacted with native speakers, who modified their language as they sought to clarify meaning for the learners. Learners in Group 2 did not engage in conversational interactions. Instead they observed the interactions between the learners and native speakers in Group 1. Group 3 included learners and native speakers who participated in the same communicative tasks as Group 1. However, for Group 3 learners, the input was premodified. That is, the native speakers used language that had been simplified and scripted to match a level of language that was assumed to be comprehensible to the learners. There was no negotiation of meaning between speakers in this group. On a post-test, learners who had engaged in conversational interactions (Group 1) produced more advanced question forms than those in the two other experimental groups.

Study 24: Learner–learner interaction in a Thai classroom

In a study relevant to the updated version of the interaction hypothesis, Kim McDonough (2004) investigated the use of pair and small group activities in English as a foreign language classes in Thailand. Students engaged in interactional activities in which they discussed environmental problems in their country. The topic was chosen as one that would generate contexts for the use of conditional clauses such as 'If people didn't leave water running while brushing their teeth, they would save an estimated 5–10 gallons each time' (p. 213). Learners were audio-recorded as they discussed the environmental problems.

The recorded conversations were examined to see the extent to which students used interactional features that are believed to facilitate second language learning, for example, negative feedback (i.e. clarification requests, explicit correction, and recasts), and modified output (i.e. a learner's more accurate/complex reformulation of his or her previous utterance). Learners were tested on their ability to produce conditional clauses in a pre-test, an immediate post-test, and a delayed post-test.

Learners who had used more negative feedback and modified output significantly improved in the accuracy of their conditional clauses. Those who made less use of these features did not. McDonough also explored opinions about the usefulness of pair work and small group activities, asking whether such activities contributed to learning. She found that the students did not perceive pair and group activities as useful for learning English. This was true both for students who seemed to have made effective use of the interaction for learning and those who had not.

Interpreting the research

Research based on the interaction hypothesis has investigated factors that contribute to the quality and quantity of interactions between second language learners. It has provided some useful information for teaching.

Certainly, the studies by Porter, Yule and Macdonald, and Storch contribute to a better understanding of how to organize group and pair work more effectively in the classroom. The Mackey and McDonough studies are two examples of research that have measured second language development in relation to different aspects of conversational interaction. In the Mackey study, the measure of second language learning was the learners' immediate production following these interactions. Thus, it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to the long-term benefits of conversational interaction. Furthermore, because this study was designed to use one-on-one pair-work activities between trained native speakers and non-native speakers focusing on a single grammatical feature, it is also difficult to relate the findings to the kind of interactions that take place in classrooms. The McDonough study helps to fill this gap because it is a classroom study and the effects of interactional features on second language learning were measured over time.

Recently, a number of laboratory studies have also examined the effects of different interactional features on specific aspects of second language learning over time. Several studies have shown that implicit corrective feedback (for example, recasts) in pair-work situations is beneficial. This may be because recasts are more salient in pair work, particularly if only one form is recast consistently (Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada 2001). In McDonough's classroom study, recasts (and other forms of corrective feedback) were likely to have been more easily noticed as well because the Thai learners were accustomed to traditional grammar instruction. This is not always the case, however. As we learned in Chapter 5, when the instructional focus is on expressing meaning through subject-matter instruction, the teachers' recasts may not be perceived by the learners as an attempt to correct their language form but rather as just another way of saying the same thing. Later in this chapter we will look at studies related to the 'Get it right in the end' position that have investigated the effects of more explicit corrective feedback on second language learning.

4 Two for one

This approach to language teaching referred to as content-based instruction is one in which learners acquire a second or foreign language as they study subject matter taught in that language. It is implemented in a great variety of instructional settings including BILINGUAL EDUCATION and immersion programmes and the 'content and language-integrated learning' (CLIL) programmes in Europe. Other educational programmes such as the 'European school' extend this further by offering instruction in two or more languages in addition to students' home language. The expectation of this approach is that students can get 'two for one', learning the subject matter content and the language at the same time.

In immersion and CLIL programmes, students choose (or their parents choose for them) to receive content-based instruction in a second language. In many educational situations, however, no other option is available. For example, in some countries, the only language of schooling is the language of a previous colonial power. In others, educational materials are not available in all local languages, so one language is chosen as the language of education. In countries of immigration, students often have access to schooling only through the majority language. Other students may have access to bilingual education programmes that allow some use of a language they already know, but the transition to the majority language is usually made within a year or two.

Research findings

In many contexts for content-based instruction, it is simply assumed that students will develop both their academic skills and second language ability. In recent years, researchers have sought to examine this assumption more critically.

Study 25: French immersion programmes in Canada

Research on Canadian French immersion programmes is often cited in support of the 'Two for one' position. Most immersion programmes are offered in primary and secondary schools, but some universities also offer content-based instruction that expands opportunities for students to use their second language in cognitively challenging and informative courses. What have the studies shown?

In terms of popularity and longevity, French immersion has been a great success. Thousands of English-speaking Canadian families have chosen this option since its first implementation in the 1960s (Lambert and Tucker 1972), both in areas where French is spoken in the wider community and where French is rarely heard outside the classroom. Numerous studies have shown that French immersion students develop fluency, high levels of listening comprehension, and confidence in using their second language. They also maintain a level of success in their academic subjects that is comparable to that of their peers whose education has been in English. Over the years, however, educators and researchers began to express concern about students' failure to achieve high levels of performance in some aspects of French grammar, even after several years of full-day exposure to the second language in these programmes (Harley and Swain 1984). Several possible explanations have been offered for this.

Some researchers argued very explicitly that French immersion shows that comprehensible input is not enough. They argued that the learners engaged in too little language production because the classes were largely teacher-centred. Students were observed to speak relatively little and were rarely

required to give extended answers. This permitted them to operate successfully with their incomplete knowledge of the language because they were rarely pushed to be more precise or more accurate. When students did speak, communication was usually satisfactory in spite of numerous errors in their speech because the learners' interlanguages were influenced by the same first language, the same learning environment, and the same limited contact with the target language outside the classroom. Teachers also tended to understand students' interlanguage, so there was rarely a need for negotiation of meaning. Such successful communication made it difficult for an individual learner to work out how his or her use of the language differed from the target language.

A second possible reason for students' lack of progress on certain language features is their rarity in content-based instruction. For example, Merrill Swain (1988) observed that even history lessons were often delivered in the 'historical present' (for example, 'The ships go down to the Caribbean; they pick up sugar and they take it back to England ...'). Roy Lyster (1994) found that the polite second person singular pronoun 'vous' was used so rarely in classes that even after years of immersion instruction, students did not use it appropriately. Elaine Tarone and Merrill Swain (1995) noted that learners with only classroom exposure to the language did not have access to the speech styles that would be typical of interaction among native speakers of the same age. Increasingly, it was suggested that subject matter instruction needed to be complemented by instruction that focused on language form, including pragmatic features of the language. In some experimental studies, learners did benefit from form-focused instruction on particular language features (see the 'Get it right in the end' proposal).

Study 26: Late immersion under stress in Hong Kong

In the 1960s the educational system in Hong Kong moved from one in which students studied either exclusively in English or in Cantonese to one in which the majority of students studied in Cantonese in primary school (grades 1–6) and in English at secondary school (grades 7–13). These late English immersion programmes were popular with Chinese parents who wanted their children to succeed professionally and academically in the international community. They were also seen as being consistent with the Hong Kong government's goal of maintaining a high level of Chinese-English bilingualism.

In reviewing some of the research on teaching and learning behaviours in late English immersion classes in Hong Kong secondary schools, Keith Johnson (1997) raised concerns about the ability of the educational system to meet the demands for such programmes. He noted that students lacked the English proficiency needed to follow the secondary level curriculum successfully. He also observed teachers' difficulties in effectively delivering the

content because of limitations in their own English proficiency. He argued that several pedagogic behaviours contributed to the inability of learners to make adequate linguistic progress in these English immersion programmes. One of them was teacher talk that consisted of English, Chinese and 'Mix' (a combination of the English and Chinese). Observational classroom studies revealed that Chinese and Mix predominated in the speech of teachers and that students interacted with the teacher and with each other in English only in minimal ways. Many students came to the first year of secondary school without any literacy skills in English. To compensate for this, teachers employed a variety of strategies to help students comprehend texts. They reduced the vocabulary load, simplified the grammar, encouraged the use of bilingual dictionaries, and provided students with supplementary notes and charts in Chinese to assist their comprehension. Johnson observed that, while 'the texts are not translated, they are essentially pretaught so that by the time students come to read the texts for themselves the more able students at least are sufficiently familiar with the content to be able to deal with them' (p.177). Although these strategies helped students understand the content, they may not have helped them learn to use the syntactic and discourse structures in the second language to establish form-meaning relationships. Therefore it is not surprising that the standards of reading in English at age fifteen were reported to be significantly lower than those for Chinese. At the same time, however, the educational outcomes for Hong Kong students in content subjects continued to be high, comparable to, and in some areas superior to, achievements in other developed countries. In addition, the levels of first language Chinese reading proficiency remained high.

A new educational policy that includes more Chinese medium education in secondary school has been implemented in recent years. The policy has been controversial, but early results seem to suggest that there may have been some decline in students' English proficiency. However, their performance on subject matter examinations appears to have benefited from having more of their instruction in Chinese, that is, when they have access to a more 'bilingual' educational opportunity (K. K. Luke, personal communication, August 3, 2005).

Study 27: Inuit children in content-based programmes
In an aboriginal community in Quebec, Canada, Nina Spada and Patsy Lightbown (2002) observed the teaching and learning of school subjects and language with Inuit children. The children are educated in their first language, Inuktitut, from kindergarten to grade 2 (age 5–7). Then, except for occasional lessons in Inuit culture, their education is in one of Canada's official languages, French or English. We found that nearly all students had some difficulty coping with subject matter instruction in their second language. In a case study of one French secondary level class, we observed instructional activities, analysed instructional materials, and assessed

students' ability to understand and to produce written French. In the observation data from a social studies lesson, it was evident that the teacher had to work very hard to help students understand a text on beluga whales. He did this in many ways—by paraphrasing, repeating, simplifying, checking for comprehension, gestures, etc. Despite these efforts it was clear that most students understood very little of the text. In a French lesson, students lacked the terminology they needed to talk about grammatical gender in relation to adjective agreement. When we examined the students' performance on a wide range of measures to assess their knowledge of French (for example, vocabulary recognition, reading comprehension, writing), it was evident that the students did not have the French language skills they needed to cope with the demands of typical secondary level instruction. Furthermore, even though many of the students were able to speak French informally outside of class, their oral abilities were limited when they had to discuss more complex academic subject matter.

The students' lack of age-appropriate academic French is a serious problem. Solving it will involve complex educational, social and cultural questions. One pedagogical element that might contribute to a solution is a better balance between language and subject matter instruction, focusing on the language that the students need to succeed in school. In addition, because Inuktitut continues to be the primary language of the local community, we suggested that further development of the learners' first language literacy would better prepare them for second language and subject matter learning. This suggestion has another important motivation. There are increasing concerns that Inuktitut will be lost as future generations shift to English or French as their preferred language. An educational system that encourages the development of both first and second languages may ensure the survival of this heritage language (Taylor, Caron, and McAlpine 2000).

Interpreting the research
Content-based instruction has many advantages. In general, it increases the amount of time for learners to be exposed to the new language. It creates a genuine need to communicate, motivating students to acquire language in order to understand the content. For older students, there is the advantage of content that is cognitively challenging and interesting in a way that is often missing in foreign language instruction, especially where lessons are designed around particular grammatical forms.

There are also some problems with content-based instruction. Our research with Inuit children adds further evidence to Jim Cummins' (1984) hypothesis that students may need several years before their ability to use the language for cognitively challenging academic material has reached an age-appropriate level. For students from disadvantaged minority groups, this delay in coming to grips with schooling can have lasting effects, as we saw in

the discussion of subtractive bilingualism in Chapter 1. Majority language students in immersion programmes—in Canada and in Hong Kong—seem to do well in learning subject matter, and it is noteworthy that they receive a substantial amount of subject matter instruction through their first language over the full course of their academic careers. However, although they are able to communicate with some fluency in the second language, students often fall short of the high levels of linguistic accuracy that their years of schooling in the language might predict. In recent years, proponents of content-based instruction have stressed the need to recall that content-based language teaching is still *language* teaching. For example, Jana Echevarria, MaryEllen Vogt, and Deborah Short (2004) have done research and developed teacher education programmes that show the effectiveness of lessons that have both content objectives and language objectives.

5 Teach what is teachable

The researcher most closely associated with this position is Manfred Pienemann. He and his associates have tried to explain why it often seems that some things can be taught successfully whereas other things, even after extensive or intensive teaching, seem to remain unacquired. As noted in Chapter 2, their research provides evidence that some linguistic structures, for example, basic word order in sentences (both simple and complex) develop along a predictable developmental path. These were labelled 'developmental features'. The developmental stages of questions that we saw in Chapter 4 are based on this research. According to Pienemann, any attempt to teach a Stage 4 word-order pattern to learners at Stage 1 will not work because learners have to pass through Stage 2 and get to Stage 3 before they are ready to acquire what is at Stage 4. As we saw in 'Get it right from the beginning', students may produce certain structures after they have been taught them in class, but cease to use them later because they are not fully integrated into their interlanguage systems. The underlying cause of the stages has not been fully explained, but they may be based at least in part on learners' developing ability to notice and remember elements in the stream of speech they hear.

Researchers supporting this view also claim that certain other aspects of language—for example, individual vocabulary items—can be taught at any time. Learners' acquisition of these 'variational features' appears to depend on factors such as motivation, the learners' sense of identity, language aptitude, and the quality of instruction, including how learners' identities and cultures are acknowledged in the classroom.

In Example 6 below, we see a teacher trying to help students with the word order of questions. The students seem to know what the teacher means, but the level of language the teacher is offering them is beyond their current stage

of development. Students are asking Stage 3 questions, which the teacher recasts as Stage 5 questions. The students react by simply answering the question or accepting the teacher's formulation.

Example 6
Students in intensive ESL (11–12 year-old French speakers) interviewing a student who had been in the same class in a previous year—see Classroom B in Chapter 5.

> S1 Mylène, where you put your 'Kid of the Week' poster?
> T   Where did you put your poster when you got it?
> S2 In my room.

(two minutes later)

> S3 Beatrice, where you put your 'Kid of the Week' poster?
> T   Where did you put your poster?
> S4 My poster was on my wall and it fell down.

In Example 7, the student is using the 'fronting' strategy that is typical of Stage 3 questions. The teacher's corrective feedback leads the student to imitate a Stage 4 question.

Example 7
(The same group of students engaged in 'Famous person' interviews.)

> S1 Is your mother play piano?
> T   'Is your mother play piano?' OK. Well, can you say 'Is your mother play piano?' or 'Is your mother a piano player?'
> S1 'Is your mother a piano player?'
> S2 No.

In Example 8, the teacher draws the student's attention to the error and also provides the correct Stage 4 question. This time, however, the feedback is not followed by an imitation or a reformulation of the question, but simply by an answer.

Example 8
(Interviewing each other about house preferences.)

> S1 Is your favourite house is a split-level?
> S2 Yes.
> T   You're saying 'is' two times dear. 'Is your favourite house a split-level?'
> S1 A split-level.
> T   OK.

In Example 9 the student asks a Stage 3 question, and the teacher provides a Stage 4 correction that the student imitates. The interaction suggests that the

student is almost ready to begin producing Stage 4 questions. Note, however, that the student does not imitate the possessive *'s*, something that French speakers find very difficult.

Example 9
('Hide and seek' game.)

    S Do the boy is beside the teacher desk?
    T Is the boy beside the teacher's desk?
    S Is the boy beside the teacher desk?

Research findings

The 'Teach what is teachable' view suggests that while some features of the language can be taught successfully at various points in the learners' development, other features develop according to the learners' internal schedule. Furthermore, although learners may be able to produce more advanced forms on tests or in very restricted pedagogical exercises, instruction cannot change the 'natural' developmental course. The recommendation is to assess the learners' developmental level and teach what would naturally come next. Let us examine some studies that have tested this hypothesis.

Study 28: Ready to learn
In a study of the acquisition of German as a foreign language, Manfred Pienemann (1988) investigated whether instruction permitted learners to 'skip' a stage in the natural sequence of development. Two groups of Australian university students who were at Stage 2 in their acquisition of German word order were taught the rules associated with Stage 3 and Stage 4 respectively. The instruction took place over two weeks and during this time learners were provided with explicit grammatical rules and exercises for Stage 4 constructions. The learners who received instruction on Stage 3 rules moved easily into this stage from Stage 2. However, those learners who received instruction on Stage 4 rules either continued to use Stage 2 rules or moved only into Stage 3. That is, they were not able to 'skip' a stage in the developmental sequence. Pienemann interprets his results as support for the hypothesis that for some linguistic structures, learners cannot be taught what they are not developmentally ready to learn.

Study 29: Readies, unreadies and recasts
Alison Mackey and Jenefer Philp (1998) investigated whether adult ESL learners who were at different stages in their acquisition of questions could advance in their immediate production of these forms if they received implicit negative feedback (i.e. recasts) in conversational interaction. As described in Chapter 5, recasts are paraphrases of a learner's incorrect utterance that involve replacing one or more of the incorrect components with a correct form while maintaining the meaning. The researchers were interested in discovering whether adult learners who received modified

interaction with recasts were able to advance in their production of question forms more than learners who received modified interaction without recasts. Furthermore, they wanted to explore whether learners who were at more advanced stages of question development ('readies') would benefit more from interaction with recasts than learners at less advanced stages of question development ('unreadies'). The results revealed that the 'readies' in the interaction plus recasts group improved more than the 'readies' in the interaction without recasts group. However, the 'unreadies' who were exposed to recasts did not show more rapid improvement than those who were not.

Study 30: Developmental stage and first language influence
Nina Spada and Patsy Lightbown (1999) have also investigated the acquisition of questions in relation to learners' developmental 'readiness'. French-speaking students (aged 11–12) in intensive ESL classes received high-frequency exposure to question forms that were one or two stages beyond their developmental stage. Learners who were judged on oral pretests to be at Stage 2 or 3 were given high frequency exposure to Stage 4 and 5 questions in the instructional input.

The materials that contained the more advanced question forms were designed to engage the learners mainly in comprehension practice. There was no student production and thus no corrective feedback, nor was there any explicit instruction on question formation. We were interested in discovering whether Stage 3 learners (i.e. those considered to be developmentally 'ready') would benefit more from the high frequency exposure to Stage 4 and 5 questions than the Stage 2 learners, who were not yet developmentally 'ready'.

Learners' performance on an oral post-test measure indicated no advantage for the Stage 3 learners. In fact, there was little progress for either group. However, on a task that required learners to judge the grammaticality of written questions there was evidence that all students had some knowledge of Stage 4 and 5 questions. A more detailed examination of the learners' performance on this task showed that students tended to accept Stage 4 and 5 questions when the subject of the sentence was a pronoun (for example, 'Are you a good student?', 'When are you going to eat breakfast?'). When the subject of the sentence was a noun, however, there was a tendency for students to reject higher stage questions (for example, 'Are the students watching TV?', 'What is your brother doing?'). This pattern in the students' performance appears to be related to a question rule in their first language. That is, in French, questions with nouns in subject position are not inverted (for example, *Peut-Jean venir chez moi?* = 'Can John come to my house?'). In French questions with pronoun subjects, however, inversion is permitted (for example, *Peut-il venir chez moi?* = 'Can he come to my house?').

These results indicate that instruction timed to match learners' developmental 'readiness' may move them into more advanced stages, but their performance may still be affected by other factors. In this study first language influence seems to be responsible for the learners' inability to generalize their knowledge of inversion to all questions.

Interpreting the research

The results of these studies suggest that targeting instructional or interactional input to learners when they are developmentally ready to progress further in the second language can be beneficial. However, other factors such as type of input and first language influence can interact with learners' developmental readiness in complex ways. If we compare the types of instructional/ interactional input across the three studies, Pienemann's provided the most explicit instruction to learners who were both 'ready' and 'unready'. The results showed that learners who were 'ready' moved into the next stage of development whereas learners were not 'ready' did not. The results of the Mackey and Philp study also offer some support for the teachability hypothesis but reveal that developmental readiness is not the only predictor of success. The fact that the 'readies' responded more positively to recasts than the 'unreadies' suggests that the type of instructional/interactional input is also important. The Spada and Lightbown study shows how the learners' first language may interact with developmental readiness in determining instructional outcomes. Furthermore, in that study there was no explicit instruction on questions. Learners were simply exposed to a high frequency of correctly formed higher stage questions in the input. Thus, they received increased 'exposure' but no 'instruction', and, in the end, they did not perform as well as learners who received focused instruction in previous studies.

There is some research that may appear to offer counter-evidence to the claim that it is beneficial to teach what is developmentally next. Several studies have used the Accessibility Hierarchy for relative clauses in English (see Chapter 4) to describe second language learners' progress in their acquisition of relative clauses. Results of these studies suggest that when low-level learners (for example, those who use relative clauses only in subject position) are taught relative clauses that are several stages beyond their current level, they not only learn what is taught, they also acquire the relative clause position(s) between the one taught and the one(s) they already knew. In some instances they even learn how to use relative clauses beyond the level they were taught (Ammar and Lightbown 2005; Eckman, Bell, and Nelson 1988; Hamilton 1994).

At first glance, this research seems to contradict Pienemann's claim that learners should be taught what is 'next'. However, it is also possible that the basis for the developmental paths of different linguistic features are based on different sorts of processing abilities. For example, it has been suggested that

once learners have learned to use relative clauses in one position (usually the subject position), there is no constraint on their ability to learn the others (Doughty 1991). What all the studies of relative clause teaching and learning have in common is that learners acquire the relative clauses in an order very similar to the accessibility hierarchy. That is, whether or not they learn what is taught, they make progress by learning subject, then direct object, then indirect object, and so on.

The 'Teach what is teachable' position is of great potential interest to syllabus planners as well as teachers. However, it must be emphasized that a description of a learner's developmental path is not in itself a template for a syllabus. There are numerous practical reasons for this, not least the fact that only a small number of language features have been described in terms of a developmental sequence. While Pienemann's work on 'processability' (see Chapter 2) provides insights into the principles that may make some features more difficult than others, those principles are not easily translated into instructional sequences. As Patsy Lightbown (1998) has suggested, the 'teach what is teachable' research is important primarily for helping teachers understand why students don't always learn what they are taught—at least not immediately. The research also shows that instruction on language that is 'too advanced' may still be helpful by providing learners with samples of language that they will be able to incorporate into their interlanguage when the time is right. However, many other factors need to be taken into consideration in choosing language features to focus on. We will return to this point after we discuss the final proposal for language teaching 'Get it right in the end.'

6 Get it right in the end

Proponents of the 'Get it right in the end' position recognize an important role for form-focused instruction, but they do not assume that everything has to be taught. Like advocates of the 'Let's talk', 'Two for one', and the 'Just listen … and read' positions, they have concluded that many language features—from pronunciation to vocabulary and grammar—will be acquired naturally if learners have adequate exposure to the language and a motivation to learn. Thus, while they view comprehension-based, content-based, task-based, or other types of essentially meaning-focused instruction as crucial for language learning, they hypothesize that learners will do better if they also have access to some form-focused instruction. They argue that learners will benefit in terms of both efficiency of their learning and the level of proficiency they will eventually reach.

Proponents of this position also agree with advocates of the 'Teach what is teachable' position that some things cannot be taught if the teaching fails to take the student's readiness (stage of development) into account. This

proposal differs from the 'Teach what is teachable' proposal, however, in that it emphasizes the idea that some aspects of language must be taught and may need to be taught quite explicitly. There are a number of situations in which guidance—form-focused instruction or corrective feedback—is expected to be especially important. For example, when learners in a class share the same first language, they will make errors that are partly the result of transfer from that shared language. Because the errors are not likely to lead to any kind of communication breakdown, it will be virtually impossible for learners to discover the errors on their own.

Examples 10, 11, and 12 are taken from a classroom where a group of twelve-year-old French speakers are learning English. In example 10, they are engaged in an activity where scrambled sentences are reordered to form sensible ones. The following sentence has been placed on the board: 'Sometimes my mother makes good cakes'.

Example 10

    T   Another place to put our adverb?
    S1 After makes?
    T   After makes.
    S2 Before good?
    T   My mother makes sometimes good cakes.
    S3 No.
    T   No, we can't do that. It sounds yucky.
    S3 Yucky!
    T   Disgusting. Horrible. Right?
    S4 Horrible!

This is hardly a typical grammar lesson! And yet the students' attention is being drawn to an error virtually all of them make in English.

Proponents of 'Get it right in the end' argue that what learners focus on can eventually lead to changes in their interlanguage systems, not just to an appearance of change. However, the supporters of this proposal do not claim that focusing on particular language points will prevent learners from making errors or that they will begin using a form as soon as it is taught. Rather, they suggest that the focused instruction will allow learners to notice the target features in subsequent input and interaction. Form-focused instruction as it is understood in this position does not always involve metalinguistic explanations, nor are learners expected to be able to explain why something is right or wrong. They claim simply that the learners need to notice how their language use differs from that of a more proficient speaker. As we will see in the examples below, teachers who work in this approach look for the right moment to create increased awareness on the part of the learner—ideally, at a time when the learner is motivated to say something and wants to say it as clearly and correctly as possible.

Example 11
(The students are practising following instructions; one student instructs, others colour.)

    S1 Make her shoes brown.
    T   Now, her shoes. Are those Mom's shoes or Dad's shoes?
    S2 Mom's.
    T   Mom's. How do you know it's Mom's?
    S1 Because it's her shoes.

As we saw in Chapter 4, French-speaking learners of English have difficulty with 'his' and 'her' because French possessives use the grammatical gender of the object possessed rather than the natural gender of the possessor in selecting the appropriate possessive form. The teacher is aware of this and—briefly, without interrupting the activity—helps the learners notice the correct form.

Example 12
(The students are playing 'hide and seek' with a doll in a doll's house, asking questions until they find out where 'George' is hiding. Although a model for correct questions has been written on the board, the game becomes quite lively and students spontaneously ask questions that reflect their inter-language stage.)

    S1 Is George is in the living room?
    T   You said 'is' two times dear. Listen to you—you said 'Is George is in?' Look on the board. 'Is George in the' and then you say the name of the room.
    S1 Is George in the living room?
    T   Yeah.
    S1 I win!

Note that the teacher's brief intervention does not distract the student from his pleasure in the game, demonstrating that focus on form does not have to interfere with genuine interaction.

Proponents of 'Get it right in the end' argue that it is sometimes necessary to draw learners' attention to their errors and to focus on certain linguistic (vocabulary or grammar) points. However, it is different from the 'Get it right from the beginning' proposal in acknowledging that it is appropriate for learners to engage in meaningful language use from the very beginning of their exposure to the second language. They assume that much of language acquisition will develop naturally out of such language use, without formal instruction that focuses on the language itself.

Research findings

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in examining issues related to this proposal, leading to both descriptive and experimental studies.

Study 31: Form-focus experiments in ESL

Since the 1980s, we have investigated the effects of form-focused instruction and corrective feedback on the developing English of French-speaking students participating in intensive ESL classes in Quebec. For five months in either grade 5 or grade 6, students (aged 10–12) spent most of every school day learning English through a variety of communicative interactive activities.

In descriptive studies involving almost 1,000 students in thirty-three classes, we found that teachers rarely focused on language form (Lightbown and Spada 1990, 1994). There was no structural syllabus, and language features were learned as they came up in communicative interaction. The emphasis of the teaching was on activities that focused on meaning rather than form, opportunities for spontaneous interaction, and the provision of rich and varied comprehensible input. In these classes, learners developed good listening comprehension, fluency, and communicative confidence in English. However, they continued to have problems with linguistic accuracy and complexity.

The experimental studies involved a smaller number of classes. In these studies, we examined the effects of form-focused instruction and corrective feedback on two linguistic features: adverb placement and question formation. In the first study, Lydia White selected adverb placement for investigation because of the differences between English and French that have been discussed (see Study 17 in 'Just listen … and read'). The hypothesis was that learners would persist in using adverb placement rules consistent with French (their first language) if they were not explicitly told how rules for adverb placement differ in English and French. Questions were selected for the second study because they have been extensively investigated in the literature and considerable comparison data were available, particularly with regard to acquisition sequences.

Both the experimental and the comparison groups were tested before the experiment began and again when the period of special instruction had ended. Throughout the period of the experiments, all students continued to participate in the regular communicative activities that were typical of their instruction. In addition, all students received instruction designed for the experiment. The researchers gave each teacher a set of pedagogical materials to be used for this purpose. The experimental groups received approximately eight hours of instruction on adverbs or questions over a two-week period.

This included some explicit teaching of the rules associated with each structure as well as corrective feedback during the practice activities. The comparison group students also had eight hours of additional instruction, but their teachers were asked to teach a different structure, one which was not the focus of the experiment. In this way, the comparison group learners could become familiar with the types of tasks and activities that were used for instruction in the experimental groups and in the testing procedures.

The studies included immediate, delayed, and long-term/follow-up post-tests. For the adverb study the test tasks were written, and in the question formation study the tests included both written and oral tasks. Learners who received explicit instruction on adverb placement dramatically outperformed the learners who did not. This was found on all tests in both the immediate and delayed post-tests (immediately following instruction and six weeks later). In the follow-up tests a year later, however, the gains made by the learners who had received the adverb instruction had disappeared and their performance on this structure was like that of uninstructed learners (White 1991).

In the question study the instructed group also made significantly greater gains than the uninstructed group on the written tasks immediately following instruction, and they maintained their level of knowledge on later testing (six weeks and six months after instruction). Focus on form also contributed to improvement in oral performance that was sustained over time.

The difference in long-term effects of the two studies may be due to a difference in the availability of the target forms in the classroom input learners were exposed to. Analysis of classroom language showed that adverbs were extremely rare in classroom speech, giving learners little opportunity to maintain their newly acquired knowledge through continued exposure and use. In contrast, there were hundreds of opportunities to hear and use questions every day in the classroom. Once learners had been given some focused instruction, it seems they were able to continue to advance in their knowledge and use of questions (White, Spada, Lightbown, and Ranta 1991; Spada and Lightbown 1993).

In several of the studies we have carried out in intensive ESL programmes, we have observed the strong influence of the learner's first language on their second language development. In Study 30 in 'Teach what is Teachable', we described the tendency of intensive ESL learners to reject inversion in questions when the subject is a noun but to accept inversion when the subject is a pronoun. The influence of the learners' first language in their acquisition of the possessive determiners 'his' and 'her' were discussed in Chapter 4 and in Study 18. This led us to consider whether form-focused instruction that includes explicit contrastive information about how the first

and second language differ would help in their development of question formation and possessive determiners. In a study to explore this, we found that learners who received instruction on possessive determiners improved more in their knowledge and use of this feature than did learners who received instruction on question forms. We related this finding to differences between the form/meaning connections of these two features. That is, a misused possessive determiner ('He's going home with her mother') is more likely to lead to a communication breakdown than an ill-formed question (for example, 'Where he going?'). Results like these point to the importance of considering how instruction may affect language features in different ways (Spada, Lightbown, and White 2005).

As we saw in the discussion of the 'Two for one' position, there is a growing belief that learners in content-based programmes such as French immersion need more opportunities to focus on form and receive corrective feedback. A number of studies have explored the question of how this can best be accomplished.

Study 32: Focusing on the conditional in French immersion
Elaine Day and Stan Shapson (1991) examined the effects of instruction on the ability of French immersion students (aged about 12 or 13) to use the conditional mood of verbs in sentences such as *Si je gagnais la loterie, je partirais en voyage* ('If I won the lottery, I would go away on a trip').

Students in the experimental classes received several hours of focused instruction on the conditional over a period of five to seven weeks. The students in the control group continued with their usual classroom routines, that is, they continued to encounter French mainly in the context of learning their general school subjects (science, mathematics, history, etc.) through the medium of French.

Special teaching materials were prepared for the experimental classes by the team of researchers. They consisted of: (1) group work that created opportunities for the use of the conditional in natural communicative situations; (2) written and oral exercises to reinforce the use of the conditional in more formal, structured situations; and (3) self-evaluation activities to encourage students to develop conscious awareness of their language use. Oral and written tests were administered before the instructional treatment, immediately after the instruction (five to seven weeks later), and at the end of the school year.

Learners in the experimental classes outperformed those in the control classes on the immediate post-tests for the written tasks, but not on the oral tasks. They were still doing better than the control group on the follow-up post-tests several months later.

Study 33: Focusing on sociolinguistic forms in French immersion
Roy Lyster (1994) examined the effects of form-focused instruction on the knowledge and use of sociolinguistic style variations in three classes of grade 8 French immersion students (about 13 years old). One of the main features examined in his study was the distinction between the use of second person singular pronouns *tu* and *vous*. The former is used to indicate informality and familiarity while the latter is used as a formal marker of politeness. Prior to instruction, immediately after, and again one month later, the learners were tested on their ability to produce and recognize these forms (in addition to others) in appropriate contexts.

The instruction took place for an average of twelve hours over a five-week period. During this time, students in the experimental classes were given explicit instruction and engaged in guided practice activities that included role plays in a variety of formal and informal contexts and corrective feedback from teachers and peers. Students in the two comparison classes continued with their regular instruction without any focused instruction or guided practice in using sociolinguistically appropriate forms. On the immediate post-test, learners in the experimental classes performed significantly better than learners in the comparison classes on both written and oral production tasks and the multiple-choice test. Furthermore, these benefits were maintained when learners were tested a month later.

Study 34: Focusing on gender in French immersion
Birgit Harley (1998) examined the effects of instruction with very young children in French immersion programmes. Six classes of grade 2 children (7 or 8 years of age) were given focused instruction on a grammatical feature that is known to be a persistent problem for French immersion students—grammatical gender. For twenty minutes a day over a five-week period these children carried out many activities based on children's games (for example, 'I spy') that were modified to draw the children's attention to gender distinctions and which required them to choose between feminine and masculine articles (*une* or *un*, *la* or *le*). Students were also taught how certain noun endings provide clues about gender (for example, *-ette* in *la bicyclette* for feminine, and *-eau* in *le bateau* for masculine). The students were pre-tested on their knowledge of grammatical gender via listening and speaking tests before the instruction began and the same tests were administered immediately after instruction and then again five months later. Learners who received instruction were much better at recognizing and producing accurate gender distinctions for familiar nouns than those who did not receive instruction. However, the instruction did not enable learners to generalize their learning to new nouns. Harley's interpretation of this is that too much new vocabulary was introduced in the later teaching activities and this meant that teachers spent more time teaching the meaning of words than the noun endings and their relationship to gender. Therefore, 'the input

on noun endings was simply not available in sufficient quantity and intensity for the majority of students to establish the predictive relevance of the noun endings in question' (p. 169).

Study 35: Focusing on verb form in content-based science classrooms

Catherine Doughty and Elizabeth Varela (1998) carried out a study with a group of ESL learners who received second language instruction in content-based teaching. One class of middle-school students (11–14 years old) from a variety of first language backgrounds received corrective feedback on past tense and conditional verb forms in English in their science class. For several weeks, while students were engaged in oral and written work related to a series of science reports, the teacher corrected their errors in past tense and conditional forms—both explicitly and implicitly. Students' ability to use these forms was assessed before and after the experimental period and again two months later. Their performance was compared to that of a group of students who were in another science class doing the same science reports but who did not receive corrective feedback on the verb forms.

Students who received the corrective feedback made more progress in using past and conditional forms than the comparison group both immediately after the period of focused feedback and two months later. Their progress was assessed in terms of both increased accuracy and the presence of interlanguage forms that showed students were doing more than repeating forms they had heard.

Study 36: Recasts and prompts in French immersion classrooms

In Chapter 5, we described some of Roy Lyster's descriptive research on the different types of corrective feedback provided by teachers in Canadian French immersion and learners' immediate responses (uptake) to that feedback. More recently, Lyster (2004) explored the effects of form-focused instruction (FFI) and feedback type on second language learning for students who were 10–11 years old, in grade 5 French immersion classrooms. There were three experimental groups and one comparison group. Learners in the experimental groups received explicit FFI on grammatical gender. The instruction drew their attention to the fact that some noun endings reliably predict grammatical gender in French. For example, it is safe to assume that words that end in -ette are feminine, while those that end in -age are masculine. After this information had been presented, students participated in approximately eight hours of instructional activities in which their attention was drawn to this language feature while they were working on their regular subject-matter instruction. Two of the experimental groups also received corrective feedback in the form of either recasts or prompts. These two types of feedback differ primarily in that recasts give learners the correct target form whereas prompts signal the need for a correction but require the student to figure out what the correct form is.

Prompts include clarification requests, repetitions, elicitation, and metalinguistic clues (see Chapter 5 for definitions and examples of these different types of feedback).

Lyster's hypothesis was that prompts 'can enhance control over already-internalized forms' (p. 406). That is, he anticipated that prompts can push learners to retrieve a target form that they have some knowledge of but do not use reliably and to compare it to their interlanguage form. The third experimental group received FFI and the related instructional activities, but did not receive consistent feedback. The comparison group of learners received neither FFI nor corrective feedback on grammatical gender. All groups continued their regular French immersion programme of content-based instruction.

On the post-tests all three FFI groups were significantly more accurate than the comparison group in assigning grammatical gender. In addition, the FFI+prompts group did significantly better than the FFI+recasts group on the written measures. However, there were no significant differences among the experimental groups (FFI, FFI + prompts, and FFI + recasts) on the oral tasks. Lyster interprets this finding as a task effect. That is, because of the time-consuming nature of oral tasks, only a randomly selected subsample of students participated in this part of the study. These students met with the researcher in three intensive one-on-one sessions. During these sessions, in order to ensure the accuracy of the data, the researcher encouraged students to speak as clearly as possible because previous research had shown that learners sometimes used a 'hybrid article' that could be interpreted as either masculine or feminine. This emphasis on clear articulation of articles provided learners in all three groups with individualized attention on the target feature and thus may have contributed to the performance of all three groups on the oral measures, regardless of their experiences in the classroom component of the research.

Study 37: Focus on form through collaborative dialogue

Motivated by sociocultural theory and the idea that language learning occurs in dialogue, Merrill Swain and Sharon Lapkin (2002) observed the language development of two grade 7 French immersion students as they wrote a story collaboratively. Later, in a 'noticing' activity, the students compared what they had written with a reformulated version of the story. The students also took part in a stimulated recall of their noticing activity. Swain and Lapkin were interested in finding out what students noticed about differences between their original version and the reformulated one and whether they made revisions to their original stories based on their collaborative talk about the reformulated version. The talk that learners produced in all phases of the research was recorded, transcribed and coded for language-related episodes—'any part of the dialogue where learners talk about the language

they produced, and reflect on their language use' (p. 292). An excerpt of the learners' collaborative talk from this study is presented in Chapter 5. The language related episodes were coded in terms of whether they focused on lexical, grammatical, or discourse features. The researchers used the original story that the two learners created together as a pretest and the stories that each learner constructed as a post-test. Both learners were much more accurate on the post-test version of the story. The researchers conclude that the multiple opportunities for learners to engage in collaborative talk on the language features in question led them to a greater understanding of their correct use.

Study 38: Focus on form in task-based instruction

In a study investigating the importance of the teacher's role in task-based instruction, Virginia Samuda (2001) explored ways of guiding adult ESL learners' attention to form-meaning relationships by focusing on expressions of possibility and probability (for example, 'might', 'could', 'it's possible'). In a task design that took learners through a 'meaning to form to meaning progression', learners were first asked to work in groups to speculate on the identity of an unknown person (for example, age, gender, occupation) by looking at a set of objects thought to come from that person's pocket. In carrying out this task, learners were observed to produce expressions of probability and possibility such as 'It's possible that he smokes' and 'maybe it's a girl', but few instances of modal auxiliaries (for example, 'must', 'may') were used. In the second phase of the task, the students were asked to come together as a whole group to tell each other what they had decided. During this phase, the teacher acted as a co-communicator and maintained the focus on meaning but gradually shifted to form by using the language that the learners had produced on their own and providing them with alternative ways of expressing uncertainty. Initially, this was done implicitly. For example if a learner said something like 'We think uh 50 per cent he smokes', the teacher said 'So you're not certain that he smokes?' After each group had presented, the teacher provided a more explicit focus. She drew the learners' attention to other ways of expressing possibility and probability by overtly talking about language form as shown in the excerpt below (p. 131).

ST   Businessman

T   Businessman ninety? OK So you're 90 per cent certain he's a businessman, right? Here's another way to say this. You think it's 90 per cent certain, so you think he must be a businessman. He must be a businessman (writes it on the board). So this (points to 'must be' on board) is showing how CERTAIN how SURE you are. Not 100 per cent, but almost 100 per cent. 90 per cent.

In the final stage of the task, the students prepared and presented a poster based on their conclusions about the identity of the unknown person to the

whole class. During this time, the teacher responded to the content and not the form of their work.

When the researcher examined the differences between expressions of probability and possibility that the students used in the first stage of this task and compared it with the final stage, there was evidence of improvement in that many more instances of modal auxiliaries were present in the learners' speech.

Interpreting the research

The overall results of the studies described above provide support for the hypothesis that form-focused instruction and corrective feedback within communicative and content-based second and foreign language programmes can help learners improve their knowledge and use of particular grammatical features. The results also show, however, that the effects of instruction are not always long-lasting. This may be related to whether there is continued exposure to a linguistic feature in the regular classroom input after the experimental treatment ends.

Swain and Lapkin's study of collaborative interaction in French immersion programmes points to the fact that teachers are not the only ones who can provide information about language form. Students can and do help each other to reflect on language form if they are given adequate guidance and a supportive structure in which to do so. Samuda's study with adult ESL learners illustrates how teachers can effectively direct students' attention to form within task-based instruction. Lyster's study of corrective feedback, also in French immersion, suggests that learners benefit more from feedback that pushes them to self-correct than from feedback that provides the correct form.

We have also seen that form-focused instruction may be more effective with some language features than with others. The successful learning of the *tu/vous* distinction in Lyster's (1994) study could be due to the fact that learning *tu* and *vous* is essentially a matter of learning two important vocabulary items and thus may have been less difficult to learn than syntactic features that affect meaning in less obvious ways. In our study with intensive learners, learners may have been more successful after instruction on possessive determiners than questions because there is a stronger form-meaning connection with possessive determiners than with questions. This suggests that form-focused instruction may have more immediate effects when the target of instruction is a language feature that clearly changes meaning. When students have difficulty with language features that do not have a major impact on the clarity or accuracy of their message, it may be necessary to sustain form-focused instruction—particularly in the form of corrective feedback—over a considerably longer period.

The implications of classroom research for teaching

Many questions have been raised by the research that has been done to test the hypotheses that the different proposals represent. Although there is still much work to do, it seems evident that proposals representing an almost exclusive focus on meaning or those representing an almost exclusive focus on form alone are not recommended. Approaches that integrate attention to form within communicative and content-based interaction receive the most support from classroom research.

We know that some exceptionally gifted learners will succeed in second language learning regardless of the teaching method. In the schools of the world, grammar translation is no doubt the most widely applied method. Most of us have met individuals whose mastery of a foreign language developed out of their experience in such classes. Similarly, audiolingual instruction has produced highly proficient second language speakers. However, we also know—from personal experience and research findings—that these methods leave many learners frustrated and unable to participate in ordinary conversations, even after years of classes. Grammar translation and audiolingual approaches will continue to be used, but the evidence suggests that 'Get it right from the beginning' does not correspond to the way the majority of successful second language learners have acquired their proficiency. On the other hand, in throwing out contrastive analysis, feedback on error, and metalinguistic explanations and guidance, the 'communicative revolution' may have gone too far.

There is increasing evidence that learners continue to have difficulty with basic structures of the language in programmes that offer little or no form-focused instruction. This calls into question extreme versions of the 'Just listen ... and read' and 'Two for One' proposals. While there is good evidence that learners make considerable progress in both comprehension and production in comprehension-based programmes, we do not find support for the hypothesis that language acquisition will take care of itself if second language learners simply focus on meaning in comprehensible input. Comprehension-based approaches are most successful when they include guided attention to language features as a component of instruction.

The 'Let's talk' proposal raises similar concerns. Opportunities for learners to engage in conversational interactions in group and paired activities can lead to increased fluency and the ability to manage conversations in a second language. However, the research also shows that learners may make slow progress on acquiring more accurate and sophisticated language if there is no focus on form. This is especially true in classes where students' shared language and learning backgrounds allow them to communicate successfully in spite of their errors. Because 'Let's talk' emphasizes meaning and attempts to simulate 'natural' communication in conversational interaction, the students' focus is naturally on what they say, not how to say it. Furthermore, when feedback on error takes the form of recasts or repetitions, learners may interpret it as a continuation of the conversation rather than focus on form. Thus, programmes based on the 'Let's talk' approach are incomplete on their own, and learners' gains in fluency and conversational skills may not be matched by their development of more accurate and complex language.

It is important to emphasize that the evidence to support a role for form-focused instruction and corrective feedback does not suggest a return to the 'Get it right from the beginning' approach. Research has shown that learners do benefit considerably from communicative interaction and instruction that is meaning-based. The results of research in French immersion, content-based courses, and communicative ESL are strong indicators that learners develop higher levels of fluency through primarily meaning-based instruction than through rigidly grammar-based instruction. The problem is that certain aspects of linguistic knowledge and performance are not fully developed in such programmes.

Research investigating the 'Teach what is teachable' proposal is not yet at a point where it is possible to say to teachers: 'Here is a list of linguistic features and the order in which they will be acquired. You should teach them in this order'. The number of features that researchers have investigated in experimental studies within this framework is far too small. On the other hand, there has been no strong evidence that teaching according to the developmental sequences is necessary or even desirable or that it will improve the long-term results in language learning. What is most valuable about this proposal is that it serves to help teachers set realistic expectations about the ways in which learners' interlanguage may change in response to instruction. The implications of 'Teach what is teachable' may be seen primarily in the fact that genuine progress in second language development must be measured in ways that include, but are not limited to, increased accuracy in language production.

According to the 'Get it right in the end' proposal, classroom activities should be built primarily on creating opportunities for students to express and understand meaningful language. However, this proposal is based on the hypothesis that form-focused instruction and corrective feedback are also essential for learners' continued growth and development. The challenge is to find the balance between meaning-based and form-focused activities. The right balance is likely to be different according to the characteristics of the learners. The learners' age, metalinguistic sophistication, prior educational experiences, motivation, and goals, as well as the similarity of the target language to a language already known need to be

taken into account when decisions are made about the amount and type of form-focus to offer.

One important decision is that of choosing the language features that are to be taught. As teachers, we know that some aspects of language are learned 'incidentally'—that learners seem to pick them up easily through simple exposure. These include high-frequency vocabulary items, features that are phonologically salient, and some grammatical patterns that are congruent with the learners' first language. Other features, however, are more likely to be more efficiently acquired with the help of instruction. Catherine Doughty and Jessica Williams (1998) and others have offered suggestions about how to identify features for form focus. One way to identify forms that may require form focus is to look at how salient the language feature is in the input. For example, a form that occurs frequently in English but is semantically redundant (i.e. not necessary in order to understand the meaning) is the third person singular -*s*. Therefore, whether a speaker says 'Keiko live in Tokyo now' or 'Keiko lives in Tokyo now', the listener will understand the meaning. For this reason, the -*s* may be difficult to notice and may not be acquired unless the learner's attention is drawn to it through form-focused instruction.

Other language features for which form-focused instruction may play a crucial role are those that are influenced by the learners' first language, particularly when there are misleading similarities between the first and second language. The difficulty may be increased in second language classrooms where learners share the same first language and reinforce each other's first language based errors. For example, students in French immersion may need guidance in distinguishing between the French *avoir/être* and English 'have/be'. Form-focused instruction may also help in those cases where learners have developed an interlanguage rule, based on the first language, that is more general than the rule in the second language, for example, the problem that French-speaking students had with adverb placement in English.

Language forms that affect meaning in ways that can lead to communication breakdown may be learned as learners engage in negotiation to solve those problems. However, some language forms have closer form/meaning connections than others. For example, if a speaker makes an error with a possessive determiner in English and says 'John took her money' instead of 'John took his money' communication is likely to be affected. The forms 'his' and 'her' are crucial to understanding the meaning. If however, a speaker says 'John take his money?' accompanied with rising intonation, instead of 'Did John take his money?', it is likely that both utterances will be understood as questions. The absence of inversion does not interfere with communication in the same way that choosing the wrong word does. Evidence from

classroom research suggests that form-focused instruction might be more important for features with weaker form/meaning connections. Indeed, it may be needed to help learners notice the difference between what they say and the correct way to say what they mean.

As we know, the rules associated with some language features are more complex than others. For example, the article system in English is both complex and abstract and notoriously difficult to teach. Thus, learners may be better off learning about articles via exposure in the input. On the other hand, a simple 'rule of thumb' such as 'put an -*s* at the end of a noun to make it plural' may be a better target for form-focused instruction. Of course, it's also possible that because some rules are so simple, learners can easily discover them on their own. However, as noted above, this may not happen if the 'easy' rule applies to a language form that is hard to hear in normal speech and if it has little effect on successful communication.

Summary

Classroom data from a number of studies offer support for the view that form-focused instruction and corrective feedback provided within the context of communicative and content-based programmes are more effective in promoting second language learning than programmes that are limited to a virtually exclusive emphasis on comprehension, fluency, or accuracy alone. Thus, we would argue that second language teachers can (and should) provide guided, form-focused instruction and corrective feedback in certain circumstances. For example, teachers should not hesitate to correct persistent errors that learners seem not to notice without focused attention. Teachers should also be especially aware of errors that the majority of learners in a class are making when they share the same first language background. They should not hesitate to point out how a particular structure in a learner's first language differs from the target language. Teachers might also try to become more aware of language features that are just beginning to emerge in the second language development of their students and provide some guided instruction in the use of these forms. It can also be useful to encourage learners to take part in the process by creating activities that draw their attention to the forms they use in communicative activities, by developing contexts in which they can provide each other with feedback, and by encouraging them to ask questions about language.

Decisions about when and how to provide form focus must take into account differences in learner characteristics, of course. Quite different approaches would be appropriate for, say, trained linguists learning a fourth or fifth language, young children beginning their schooling in a second language environment, both younger and older immigrants who cannot

read and write their own language, and adolescents studying a foreign language for a few hours a week at school.

Many teachers are aware of the need to balance form-focus and meaning-focus, and they may feel that recommendations based on research simply confirm their current classroom practice. Although this may be true to some extent, it is hardly the case that all teachers have a clear sense of how best to accomplish their goal. It is not always easy to step back from familiar practices and say, 'I wonder if this is really the most effective way to go about this?' Furthermore, it can be difficult to try out classroom practices that go against the prevailing trends in their educational contexts. Many teachers still work in environments where there is an emphasis on accuracy that virtually excludes spontaneous language use in the classroom. At the same time, the introduction of communicative language teaching methods has sometimes resulted in a complete rejection of attention to form and error-correction in second language teaching. But it is not necessary to choose between form-based and meaning-based instruction. Rather, the challenge is to find the best balance of these two orientations.

Classroom-based research on second language learning and teaching has given us partial answers to many questions. Through continuing research and experience, researchers and teachers will fill in more details, always recognizing that no single answer will be adequate for all learning environments. Among the questions we will continue to ask are these: How can classroom instruction provide the right balance of meaning-based and form-focused instruction? Which features of language will respond best to form-focused instruction, and which will be acquired without explicit focus if learners have adequate access to the language? Which learners will respond well to metalinguistic information and which will require some other way of focusing attention on language form? When is it best to draw learners' attention to form—before, after, or during communicative practice? How should corrective feedback be offered and when should learners be allowed to focus their attention on the content of their utterances? Continued classroom-centred research, including the action research by teachers in their own classrooms, will provide further insights into these and other important issues in second language teaching and learning.

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