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Introduction: Developments in Language Teaching Research

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What is 'Language Teaching Research'?

The journal that I currently edit is called *Language Teaching Research*. It provides this guidance to authors:

> Language Teaching Research will publish articles related to qualitative or quantitative research in the fields of second and foreign language teaching. Articles dealing with the teaching of languages other than English will be welcome. Articles reporting studies of language learning without a clear reference to the role of teaching will not be considered.

This definition recognizes that language teaching research can focus on teaching that takes place in different contexts and different languages. It also seeks to make a distinction between research that focuses on teaching, and research that focuses only on learning, excluding the latter. This distinction, however, is not always clear cut. What if the research focuses on the learning that results when learners perform some instructional task? Is this research on 'teaching' or on 'learning'? The answer depends on whether the 'task' is viewed as 'teaching'. In fact, I think a case can be made for this. 'Teaching' is a complex phenomenon that can be operationalized in many different ways. Ultimately, language teaching research (as opposed to language learning research) entails the systematic investigation of some instructional artifact (e.g. a 'task') or some instructional procedure (e.g. small group work). This can be carried out descriptively in which case it simply documents what happens when the artifact or procedure is used or by investigating the link between what is taught and what is learned. In this book, I will base my selection of the research to be examined on this definition.

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Another somewhat problematic distinction is between 'language teaching research' and 'second language classroom research'. Allwright (1983: 191) distinguished 'research centred on the classroom' and 'research that concentrates on the inputs to the classroom (the syllabus, the teaching materials) and the outputs from the classroom (learner achievement scores)'. The problem here lies in the difficulty of distinguishing what is an 'input' from what actually transpires when an input is implemented in the language classroom. For example, is research that focuses on the kind of language that arises when learners perform a specific task (e.g. a Spot-the-Difference task) in groups 'research centred on the classroom' or 'research that concentrates on the input to the classroom'? It is clearly both. I have elected to focus on 'language teaching research' because this term encompasses both research centred on the classroom and research on the inputs to the classroom. However, I will not consider research that has examined inputs in isolation from their actual use. In short, my concern is to document what has been discovered when language teaching takes place.

Language teaching research covers an enormous range of issues making it necessary for me to restrict the research I will cover in another way. I will limit my coverage to research that has focused on teaching directed at increasing learners' knowledge of a second language. I will address the central question 'How does teaching promote interlanguage development'? The term 'interlanguage', coined initially by Selinker (1972), refers to the systematic knowledge of a second language (L2) that learners construct at different stages of development through their experiences of the L2. Thus, I will examine how classrooms provide contexts in which learners can develop their interlanguages. This means that I will exclude the vast body of research that has investigated how teaching assists the development of language skills – for example, how teaching helps learners become proficient readers and writers in an L2. To include such research would make this book unwieldy and it would lose its essential focus on the language classroom as a site where learners build their knowledge of language as a system.

This raises another definitional problem – what is meant by 'language classroom'? Stereotypically, this consists of a teacher and a number of students who meet face-to-face in a confined space. But this definition raises questions. Is a 'content' or 'immersion' classroom also a language classroom? In such classrooms, there may not be any planned attempt to teach language directly, but they nevertheless constitute sites in which many L2 learners find themselves and they afford opportunities for language learning as well as content learning. Such classrooms have generally been viewed as 'language classrooms'. Another issue is whether one-on-one academic advising sessions between an instructor/tutor and a language learner constitute a 'language classroom'. A number of often-cited studies (e.g. Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994) have examined this kind of setting. Finally, there is the question of computer-mediated instruction, which itself can take a number of different forms (for example, learners working in small groups on a computer-delivered activity or in teacher-centred online lessons). These take place in cyber 'classrooms'. In this book, I will draw on research that has investigated all these types of language classrooms but, in general, I will focus on teaching that takes place in face-to-face classrooms.

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There is still one further definitional issue. Nunan (1991) drew a distinction between 'classroom research' and 'classroom-orientated research'. The former consists of studies that investigated learners inside actual classrooms, while the latter consists of studies that were motivated by issues of clear relevance to classroom teaching and learning but which were conducted outside the classroom in a laboratory setting. A number of studies (e.g. Foster, 1998; Gass, Mackey, and Ross-Feldman, 2005) have sought to compare whether what transpires in a laboratory and a classroom setting is similar or different. The results are somewhat mixed. However, as Spada and Lightbown (2009) pointed out, 'classroom studies are more likely to lead to a better understanding about the kind of interaction that occurs in classrooms where the teacher is the only proficient speaker and interacts with a large number of learners' (p. 159). For this reason, I have elected to consider mainly research that has taken place inside classrooms in this book.

Why Investigate L2 Classrooms?

There are two very different reasons. Some researchers use the classroom as a convenient site to collect data in order to test hypotheses based on some theory of language learning. For example, Trahey and White (1993) conducted a classroom-based study in order to investigate to what extent positive evidence helped French learners of English to eradicate an error involving adverb placement (e.g. * Mary hugged passionately John). Their study was framed within a particular theory of language learning which claims that positive evidence is sufficient for learning to occur (i.e. learners do not require negative evidence in the form of explicit instruction or corrective feedback). This study is an example of 'pure research' conducted in a classroom.

Other researchers conduct classroom-based studies because they are interested in collecting data relating to specific instructional practices and, often, the impact of these practices on language learning. Their aim is to gain a better understanding of how instruction works and how it facilitates learning. For example, Bitchener and Knoch (2008) conducted a study to investigate the effect of different types of written corrective feedback on the writing produced by two different groups of English as a second language (ESL) learners – migrants (i.e. learners who were resident in the country) and international students (i.e. students living temporarily in the country for the purposes of improving their proficiency). They framed their study not in terms of theory but in terms of the debate that has raged regarding the value of written corrective feedback in helping learners achieve greater accuracy in their writing and also the need to investigate such issues on different populations of instructed learners. The results they provide, therefore, speak directly to the kinds of questions teachers are likely to ask (i.e. Should I correct my students' written errors and if so how?). Of course, studies such as those by Bitchener and Knoch are not atheoretical and the results they provide can be used to support or refute theoretical propositions. But they constitute 'applied research' because they have as their starting point a pedagogic rather than a theoretical issue.

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The purpose of this book is to examine how language teaching research can inform language pedagogy. It is a book intended for teachers, especially those engaged in some form of post-service training who are interested in theorizing about language teaching and who wish to base their enquiry not just on their own experience of language classrooms but also on what research has shown about language teaching and its contribution to language learning. For this reason, I will focus mainly on 'applied' rather than 'pure' classroom-based research. So doing allows for a more direct link between research and pedagogy. Arguably, a teacher informed about what research has shown about language teaching is better placed to reflect on instructional materials and practices and the theory that underscores them. However, it must be acknowledged from the outset that applied research does not solve pedagogic problems – the results of such research cannot be simply 'applied' to teaching. Rather the value of such research lies in its ability to identify problems that otherwise might go unnoticed and, sometimes, to provide evidence as to how these problems might be solved in specific teaching contexts. As Widdowson (2003) noted, applied linguists fall into the same category as methodologists and teacher trainers – 'they are in no position to recommend particular courses of action' but can only 'point out possibilities it might be profitable to explore' (p. 15). In other words, applied research can only offer what Stenhouse (1975) called 'provisional specifications' and it is up to teachers themselves to decide whether these are relevant to their own teaching context. This is the perspective that informs this book.

A Brief History of Language Teaching Research

In the introduction to her impressive and compendious *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, Hinkel (2005) commented 'systematic research into language teaching is a relatively new enterprise' and then noted that, in contrast, 'for thousands of years in the actual practice of L2 teaching and learning, development and refinement of methods has been carried out experientially, experimentally, and intuitively' (p. xix-xx). Hinkel makes an important distinction between the informal research that takes place when teachers subject their own teaching to critical scrutiny and 'systematic research' by which she means research carried out in a principled manner and (usually) reported explicitly. This is an important distinction. It raises questions as to the value of these two kinds of enquiry – experiential and systematic – to the language teaching profession. It also invites an enquiry into whether these two approaches are as distinct as Hinkel suggests and whether it is possible to combine them. In Chapter 2, I will consider Allwright's (2003) proposals for 'exploratory practice', which aims to merge the 'systematic' and the 'experiential'. For the time being, however, I will accept Hinkel's distinction, and focus on providing a brief history of 'systematic' language teaching research. However, I will show that this is not quite the 'relatively new enterprise' that Hinkel claims it is. My definition of 'systematic research' is research where a question or problem has been

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identified, relevant data for addressing this problem collected, appropriate analysis and interpretation undertaken and, except in the case of practitioner research, a report of the study published in a form that makes it available for public scrutiny.

One of the commonest ways of publishing research is in a journal. Table 1.1 gives the titles of some major journals that publish research on language teaching, the date of the first issue of each journal and the name of the publisher. There are of course many other regional journals that publish research on language teaching including in languages other than English.

It is revealing to trace how these journals have evolved. The editorial of the first issue of *TESOL Quarterly*, for example, announced that 'the content of the journal will be varied' and then went on to say that although the major emphasis would be on 'practical matters' linguistic theory would also be addressed. Interestingly, there is no mention in this editorial of research on language teaching. Nor does the list of contents of this first issue include a research article. The early issues of *TESOL Quarterly* are dominated by articles on 'practical issues' and reports of particular instructional programmes. However, by the fourth issue of the second volume (December, 1968), the journal acknowledges the importance of research by introducing a section called 'Recent Research in TESOL' with the aim of publishing 'critical evaluations of selected reports' (Spolsky, 1968). This paved the way for a gradual increase in research-based articles. Today, the majority of articles published in *TESOL Quarterly* are research-based. All the main articles in Volume 42, issue 2 (the current issue at the time I am writing this chapter) report empirical studies of some aspect of teaching. The evolution of *TESOL Quarterly* – from a primary

Table 1.1 Major journals publishing articles on language teaching research

Journal	*Date of first issue*	*Publisher*
The Modern Language Journal	1916	Published initially by the National Association of Modern Language Teachers Associations and currently by Wiley-Blackwell
English Language Teaching Journal	1946	Published initially by the British Council and in later years by Oxford University Press
TESOL Quarterly	1967	Published by The Teachers of English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) from its inception to now
Foreign Language Annals	1967	Published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
System	1973	Elsevier Publications
Language Teaching Research	1987	Published initially by Edward Arnold and later by Sage Publications

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concern for 'practical matters' to an overriding preference for reports of empirical studies is reflected to a very large extent in those journals listed in Table 1.1 that predated 1970.

Chaudron (2001) undertook a review of articles reporting L2 classroom research published in one of these journals – *The Modern Language Journal* (*MLJ*) – which was first published in 1916 and thus has the longest history. Chaudron's review provides a snapshot of what counted as language teaching research from that date up to today. Chaudron offered the following synoptic picture of classroom research.

Chaudron notes that classroom research throughout the past century has principally documented the nature of programmes, methods, techniques, and other processes of interaction in classrooms, in association with their outcomes in learners' behaviours and attitudes (p. 57). He distinguished four broad research trends: (1) quasi-experimental method comparisons directed at identifying the relative effect of different teaching methods on L2 achievement, (2) observational studies of the oral interactions that take place in a language classroom, (3) discussions of research methodology for classrooms and (4) investigations of the teacher-student interactions that occur when performing specific instructional tasks. After electing to limit his review mainly to post-secondary foreign language classroom research and after eliminating studies of language laboratory use and computer-assisted language learning, studies that focused exclusively on learner characteristics and psycholinguistic experiments not oriented towards teaching, Chaudron identified more than 100 studies which he saw as affording 'a fascinating profile of many of the major tendencies and evolving concerns in modern language teaching' (p. 59), which he then proceeded to document.

The early period (1916–1935) was characterized primarily by method–comparison research. Bennett (1917), for example, compared two approaches to the use of translation as a teaching technique – first language (L1) to second language (L2) and L2 to L1. In the 1920s method comparisons focused on the effects of grammar translation as opposed to the Reading Method or Direct Method. These method comparisons carried on into the 1930s in studies that grew increasingly rigorous in their methodology.

In the war years (1936–1950) few classroom research studies meeting his selection criteria appeared. Chaudron speculated that this might be because of an editorial preference for articles with a political slant. Even in the 1950s, relatively few research studies appeared and those that did involved more method comparisons (e.g. Beck's (1951) study comparing the audiolingual and reading methods). The 1950s was a period during which attention switched to the linguistic and psychological underpinnings of audiolingualism with little attention given to the empirical investigation of the claims made on behalf of this method. An interesting exception to this generalization, however, was Grew's (1958) diary study that documented his teaching experience in an elementary grade French class on a daily basis over an entire school year. As Chaudron noted, this study was the first to report direct observation of actual teaching and was unique. No replication of Grew's approach appeared in the subsequent years.

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The 1960s saw a number of classroom studies published in the journal, which in part reflected the innovatory nature of teaching in this decade. Moskowitz and Amidon (1962) for example compared the effects of the use of television as opposed to live audiolingual classes on children's attitudes to their French classes. Method comparisons of one kind or another continued to dominate, however, although these were now conducted with better designs, with attention given to collecting information about students' attitudes to the different kinds of instruction that were being compared, as for example in Blickenstaff and Woerdehoff (1967). Interestingly, the research in this decade was still characterized by a lack of attention to the actual instructional behaviours that arise when a method is implemented in the classroom. An article towards the end of the decade, however, paved the way for such research. Jarvis (1968) described a classroom observation scheme that could be used to record teacher and learner behaviours and provided an illustration of its use.

The method comparison studies continued into the 1970s. The focus of these comparisons, however, shifted to an examination of individualized instruction in comparison to more traditional, whole class instruction. Boyd-Bowman et al. (1973), for example, investigated the relative effects of individualized instruction, traditional classroom instruction and team-taught lessons on Spanish achievement.

A natural development of this interest in individualized instruction was the increased focus on the classroom learner. Interest in the learner was also motivated by the growing body of research into L2 acquisition which showed that instructed learners seemed to follow a similar acquisitional path to naturalistic learners (e.g. Dulay and Burt, 1973). However, the research articles published in the *MLJ* during the 1980s were focused more on individual difference factors such as attitudes, anxiety, personality, cognitive styles and beliefs than on acquisitional orders and sequences. It was left to other journals – in particular *TESOL Quarterly* and *Language Learning* – to publish articles that addressed the latter. Other *MLJ* articles in the 1980s focused on the verification of actual teaching practices by asking teachers to self-report their classroom practices, as in Swaffar, Arens and Morgan (1982), and actual observation of their behaviours in the classroom, as in Nerenz and Kopf (1982). In addition to these new developments, the method comparisons continued, although Chaudron noted that this line of research was weakening.

The 1990s saw a real break from method comparisons. Classroom research was now more clearly influenced by L2 acquisition research, as evidenced in the studies that examined the effects of task-based interaction on L2 performance and learning, the experimental studies that examined the effects of specific types of form-focused instruction on the acquisition of grammatical features, and the interest in documenting the characteristics of teacher-talk and learner contributions to classroom interaction, with both viewed as shaping opportunities for language acquisition. Chaudron noted:

> After more than 80 years of research on classrooms, it is noteworthy to finally encounter in the journal such revealing evidence of the real processes of teaching and learning (p. 65).

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In fact, the *MLJ* was a little late on the scene in this respect, as articles examining 'the real processes of teaching and learning' had begun to appear in other academic journals, notably *Applied Linguistics* and *Language Learning*, in the previous decade (see, for example, my 1984b article 'Can Syntax be Taught? A study of the effects of formal instruction on the acquisition of WH questions by children'). The 1990s also witnessed another significant development in classroom research. In this decade, the *MLJ* began publishing articles that drew on a particular theoretical view of teaching and learning – sociocultural theory – which was gaining the attention of both L2 acquisition researchers and teacher educators. In 1994, the *MLJ* published a collection of papers based on this theoretical perspective, including a number that examined language instruction. Most notable is Aljaafreh and Lantolf's detailed study of corrective feedback episodes based on one-on-one interactions between a student and their tutor. Overall, then, the 1990s witnessed a notable broadening and deepening of focus on actual teaching-learning behaviours.

A number of points stand out in this brief history of the changing research trends that Chaudron identified in his review. The first is that method comparisons of one kind or another have been pervasive. The second is that the main focus of research has shifted somewhat from one period to another (for example, individualized instruction was the focus of the 70s, individual learner factors figured in the 1980s, and classroom processes featured in the 1990s). It should be noted, however, that there is considerably more to L2 classroom research than that reported in the *MLJ*. Chaudron's review, therefore, is only an incomplete reflection of trends in this domain. A final point, emphasized by Chaudron, is that the research improved notably in methodological sophistication and rigour over the years.

Chaudron reviewed research up to 2000 but we are now well into the twenty-first century. What developments have taken place in classroom-based research into L2 teaching in the first decade of this century? I will undertake my own brief review of the *MLJ* to answer this question. Of immediate note is that in this decade there are two special issues of the *MLJ* devoted to classroom research. Volume 88, issue 4, entitled 'Classroom Talks' reports studies that employed a variety of methods to document the oral interactions that take place in classrooms. Volume 89, issue 3 on 'Methodology, Epistemology, and Ethics in Instructed SLA Research' demonstrates classroom researchers' increasing need to address both methodological issues and the wider moral issues involved in investigating classrooms. These two volumes are a testimony to the centrality of classroom-based research in the *MLJ* during this decade. Indeed, the majority of articles now report empirical studies of some aspect of the L2 classroom. There is also a relatively new area of interest – the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in language learning. However, many of the research themes apparent in the 1990s are still evident.

Overall, one is struck by the sheer range of research topics and research methodologies that figure in this decade of the *MLJ*. There are survey studies that examine teachers' and learners' perceptions of and beliefs about different instructional practices (such as corrective feedback). There are studies that examine the impact of such individual difference variables as anxiety and willingness to communicate on

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learners' responsiveness to instruction. There are studies investigating the effects of learner strategy training. There are numerous descriptive studies documenting 'processes' such as attention to form and code switching that arise in classroom interaction. There are product-oriented studies that investigate the effects of some specific instructional practice on learning. There are experimental process-product studies that examine the relationship between specific instructional processes and learning outcomes. There are studies that look at whole programmes (such as study abroad) in terms of how they are implemented or how effective they are. These studies address all aspects of the L2 – phonology, vocabulary, grammar, discourse – and also all the language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – in a variety of L2s. The studies investigate very different instructional contexts – foreign language, second language, heritage language and immersion – and from a variety of theoretical perspectives – cognitive, interactionist, sociocultural and sociocognitive. In addition there are one or two studies that report the effects of teacher education/training programmes on teachers' actual teaching. There are also other avenues of research not represented in this decade of *MLJ* articles. For example, researchers have become interested in teachers' non-verbal behaviour in the classroom, as illustrated by Lazaraton's (2004) microanalytic study in *Language Learning*, which investigated one teacher's speech and use of gesture when explaining vocabulary to students in an intensive English language programme. It also possible to see a shift in the choice of research methodology in this decade, with an increasing number of studies utilizing qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

The variety and scope of current research is truly remarkable and poses a challenge to anyone – such as myself – seeking to synthesize its findings. In the following sections of this Chapter I will begin my attempt at this synthesis. The main challenge facing me is how best to organize my review of the language teaching research. Chaudron in his 1988 review of the research identified four main topics: teacher-talk, learner behaviour, teacher-student interaction and learning outcomes. I have included these topics in my own synthesis but expanded on them by including separate chapters on comparative method studies (reflecting the prevalence of this type of research early on), on task-based teaching (given the current interest in this form of instruction), on form-focused instruction (given the large number of studies that have investigated this) and the current interest in the role played by individual difference factors such as language aptitude and motivation in mediating the effects of instruction. Here I provide a brief introduction to the key issues that will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Comparative Method Studies

As we have seen, much of the earliest research investigating the effects of teaching was 'method' oriented; that is, it consisted of comparisons of language teaching methods that differed in their conceptualizations of how to teach language and investigated their effects on learning in terms of general proficiency. Such studies

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began in the early 1900s and have continued up to today, although their popularity has diminished in recent years as language teaching moved into the 'post-method' era (Kumaradivelu, 1994). I examine a number of key comparative method studies in Chapter 3.

The aim of comparative method studies is to establish which of two or more methods or general approaches to language teaching is the most effective in terms of the actual learning (the 'product') that is achieved after a given period of time. Many of the earlier studies were 'global' in nature, conducted over weeks, months, and even years. Later ones were more 'local'; that is they examined differences resulting from shorter periods of exposure with more narrowly defined methods and measured learning outcomes in terms of the acquisition of specific linguistic features rather than general language proficiency. The design of these studies typically was experimental, with one group of learners taught by one method and a second group by another method. At the end of the specified period the learners completed a battery of tests. The two groups' scores on these tests were then compared.

Perhaps the heyday of the method comparison studies was in the 1960s. However the studies reported in Scherer and Wertheimer (1964), Smith (1970) and Levin (1972) failed to produce clear-cut results and this led to a questioning of the value of such method studies. Gradually, the focus of research shifted away from method comparisons in favour of process studies that documented classroom behaviours.

Comparative method studies were not abandoned, however. For example, when communicative language teaching (CLT) appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, attempts were made to compare this with 'traditional' instruction (e.g. Beretta and Davies, 1985; Palmer, 1979). But, once again, the results of these studies were mixed with many failing to demonstrate any differences in the learning outcomes that resulted from the different methods. A problem underlying all the studies was the difficulty in controlling the presage and process variables that potentially impact on learning.

However, the tradition of comparing different ways of teaching has not disappeared. Rather than such comparisons being carried out on a global scale (e.g. over a whole course), they are now conducted in short-term experimental studies that investigate the effects of highly specific instructional strategies on L2 learning. Increasingly, the instructional strategies chosen for study are derived not from 'methods' but from theories of language learning. A good example of these later studies can be found in the investigations of different types of form-focused instruction (see Chapter 9).

Second Language Classroom Discourse

Disenchantment with the global method studies following the large scale studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s led to a growth in research that sought to provide descriptions of the teaching and learning behaviours that arose in the L2 classroom.

The key characteristic of the studies emanating from this new form of enquiry was that they were 'descriptive'; that is they focused on the 'process' features of L2 classrooms. Under this general heading, however, the studies have drawn on a variety

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of different research methods. The earlier studies (i.e. those in the 1960s and 1970s) employed 'interactional analysis' (i.e. they used observational systems consisting of a set of categories for coding specific classroom behaviours). A limitation of such systems is that information is lost about 'the sequential flow of classroom activities' (McLaughlin, 1985: 149) because the behaviours of the teacher and the learners are treated separately. Later approaches sought to describe the structure of the interactions that occur, using the methods involved in 'discourse analysis' (e.g. Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), 'conversational analysis' (e.g. Markee, 2000; Seedhouse, 2004), the 'ethnography of communication' (e.g. Zuenglar and Cole, 2005) and in research based on sociocultural theory (e.g. Ohta, 2001). Chapter 2 examines these different descriptive methods in detail.

This research illuminated a number of key aspects of L2 classroom discourse. It showed, for example, that many classroom interactions were characterized by a particular type of structure known as (IRF), where the teacher initiates an exchange, a student responds and the teacher then follows up. The extent to which this structure inhibits or promotes opportunities for language learning has been the subject of considerable debate (see, for example, Gourlay, 2005). Other studies (e.g. Ellis, 1984a; Johnson, 1995; Van Lier, 1988) showed that the nature of the discourse that arises varies according to the particular type of language use involved. In a similar mode, Seedhouse (2004) used conversational analysis to show how classroom turn-taking mechanisms vary according to whether the context is 'form and accuracy' or 'meaning and fluency'. Major foci of ethnographic studies are the 'participant structures' (e.g. teacher–class versus teacher–student versus student–student) found in the classroom and how learners are socialized into the norms of classroom behaviour. Researchers who draw on sociocultural theory have focused on how specific types of classroom interaction (for example, interactional routines) 'scaffold' learners' L2 production and acquisition. Underlying much of this research has been the assumption that the discourse that results when the focus is on trying to learn a language, is different from that which results when the focus is on trying to communicate. This comparison was motivated by the assumption that the general characteristics of classroom discourse are so far removed from those of naturalistic discourse that they are unlikely to promote the communicative competence needed for everyday communication.

Chapter 4 examines research that has looked at the general characteristics of L2 classroom discourse. However, it is also possible to examine the nature of the teacher's and the learners' contributions separately.

Focus on the Teacher

In Chapter 5, I examine a number of the key characteristics of the teacher's use of language in the L2 classroom. These are:

1. Teacher-talk: Studies of teacher-talk were common in the 1970s and 1980s (see Chaudron 1988 for a review) but they have gradually lost popularity. They sought

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to describe the phonological, lexical, grammatical, and discoursal properties of the teacher's language, motivated by the felt need to document the nature of the 'input' that learners are exposed to in classroom environments.

2. Teacher questions: Teachers typically ask a lot of questions (see, for example, Long and Sato, 1984). Much of the research has been taxonomic and quantitative in nature. It has shown that teachers typically ask 'display' questions (i.e. questions that 'test' the learner by eliciting already known information). Some researchers have seen such questions as limiting opportunities for learning. However, other researchers (e.g. McCormick and Donato, 2000) have been critical of the taxonomic approach to investigating teacher questions, arguing that they are better viewed as 'dynamic discursive tools' that serve 'to build collaboration and to scaffold comprehension and comprehensibility'.
3. Use of the L1: This remains a complex and controversial issue. It is complex because clearly the potential of the L1 to assist learning depends on the instructional context. It is controversial because different theories of L2 acquisition afford very different hypotheses about the value of L1 use in the classroom. Reviewing research that had investigated the teacher's use of the L1, Turnbull and Arnett (2002) argued that 'since teachers are often the primary source of linguistic input in the target language (TL), it is therefore reasonable to argue that maximizing the TL in the classroom is a favourable practice' (p. 205). Other researchers, however, have seen merit in some uses of the L1.
4. Metalanguage: The teachers' use of metalanguage has attracted less attention. It is likely to vary considerably depending on whether or not they believe that learning grammar explicitly is important for language learning and on their assessment of their students' ability to handle technical terms (see Borg, 1999).
5. Corrective feedback: The study of how teachers correct their students' errors spans several decades. Some studies have adopted a taxonomic approach, identifying and quantifying the different strategies that teachers use to correct learner errors (see, for example, Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Other studies have made use of the techniques of conversational analysis to describe how teachers 'repair' learner errors. It is clear that corrective feedback is an enormously complex process that varies from teacher to teacher depending on such factors as the broader instructional context, the kind of instructional activity they are engaged in, and the teachers' assessment of the relevance of correction to the particular learners they are teaching.
6. Teacher cognitions: Teachers hold beliefs about teaching and construct their own personal theories of teaching (Woods, 1996) which potentially influence how they act. One of the findings of research that has examined the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual use of language is that there is often a mismatch between beliefs and practice due to the fact that teachers' beliefs are sometimes in conflict – creating what Woods (1996) called 'hotspots'. Faced with a specific situation in the classroom, teachers may act in accordance with one belief knowing that in so doing they are ignoring another. In time, such hotspots may be resolved as teachers gain in experience and expertise.

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Focus on the Learner

Chapter 6 examines learners' use of language in the L2 classroom.

Longitudinal studies of classroom learners are based on the speech they produce in a classroom context. Early studies (Ellis, 1984a; Felix, 1981; Lightbown, 1983) investigated the route of learners' grammatical development, comparing this to the order and sequence of acquisition reported for naturalistic learners. They showed that the process of classroom learners' acquisition is very similar to that of naturalistic learners. Later studies have focused on classroom learners' pragmatic development (e.g. Belz and Kinginger, 2003; Ellis, 1992). Also a number of ethnographic studies (e.g. Morita, 2004) have viewed L2 classrooms as social contexts that require learners to behave in specific ways, often limiting their opportunities to participate actively in the discourse. The longitudinal studies provide valuable information about how learner participation and L2 acquisition take place in a classroom context.

Descriptive studies have addressed different aspects of learners' classroom language:

1. *Silent period*. Some learners (especially young children) manifest a silent period in the beginning stage unless they are required to produce. However, when this occurs they may also engage in private speech, which seems to prepare them for later production.
2. *Formulaic speech*. Studies (e.g. Myles, Hooper and Mitchell, 1988) have shown that learners make extensive use of formulaic sequences such as 'I don't know' and 'Can I have a —?' in order to cope with their basic communicative needs in both second and foreign language classrooms. There is some evidence that these sequences are subsequently broken down and their components fed into their developing rule systems.
3. *Learner initiation*. Other studies have investigated learners' use of the L1, the extent to which they possess L2 metalanguage and the uses they make of this when performing different instructional activities, learner questions, the role played by repetition of the teacher's or other learners' speech, the extent to which they repair their errors following corrective feedback (i.e. their 'uptake'), and language play. A key theme in these studies is the importance of learner initiation. Van Lier (1988) argued that learners need opportunities to self-select because these cater for experimentation with language at the cutting edge of their linguistic development. Self-selection depends to a large extent on the opportunities afforded the learner to control topic development, which in turn depends on the nature of the instructional activity.

One of the most obvious ways of encouraging learner participation in the classroom is through small group work. A number of studies have reported that students working in small groups produce a greater quantity of language and also better quality language than students in a teacher-fronted, lockstep classroom setting.

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Group work also affords learners the opportunity to negotiate for meaning when a communication problem arises, especially if the task the learners are performing requires a two-way flow of information (see Pica and Doughty, 1985a). These studies suggest that group work can provide the interactional conditions that have been hypothesized to facilitate acquisition more readily than interaction involving teachers. However, some educators and researchers (e.g. Prabhu, 1987) have argued that group work may be less effective than is often claimed as it exposes learners to 'interlanguage talk' (i.e. input that is non- target-like) and thus may stunt their development.

Investigating Tasks

The study of group work is closely associated with research that has investigated 'tasks' as much of this has examined how learners perform different kinds of tasks when working together in pairs or small groups. The investigation of 'tasks' constitutes a major focus in language teaching research since the mid 1980s, stimulated to a large degree by growing interest in task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2003; Samuda and Bygate, 2008). In Chapter 7 I consider the research that has investigated the language use that results from performing tasks in the classroom.

A number of studies (e.g. Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki, 1994; Loschky, 1994) have investigated input-based tasks. These tasks often take the form of listen-and-do tasks where learners are required to demonstrate their comprehension of the teacher's instructions or descriptions either non-verbally or by means of minimal verbal responses. Other studies have investigated interactive tasks (i.e. information-gap or opinion-gap tasks) performed in pairs or small groups in terms of whether they create contexts where communication problems and subsequent 'negotiation of meaning' occurs (Long, 1983c; 1996). Still other studies (e.g. Foster and Skehan, 1996) have investigated the impact of various task-design variables (e.g. topic familiarity) and implementation variables (e.g. pre-task planning) on learner production, measured in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity. Another strand of research has investigated 'focused tasks' (i.e. tasks that have been designed to elicit the use of some specific linguistic feature such as a grammatical structure).

Underlying much of this research is the importance of 'focus on form'. Long (1991) defines 'focus on form' as interactional behaviour that 'overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication' (pp. 45–46). Researchers have explored the different ways in which this takes place – pre-emptively when a learner asks a question about a form or the teacher explicitly draws attention to it and reactively through corrective feedback. Focus on form is hypothesized to play an important role in language acquisition because it induces learners to pay conscious attention to form while they are engaged in trying to communicate.

Other researchers have examined tasks from the perspective of sociocultural theory, focusing on how the interactants jointly construct their performance of a task.

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One of the points that researchers in this tradition emphasize is the distinction between 'task' (i.e. the actual task materials that are given to the learners) and 'activity' (i.e. the actual performance of the task). They stress that the 'task' cannot determine the 'activity' as learners will approach tasks with different goals, motives and strategies and that these influence how they perform it. The emic perspective adopted by socioculturally oriented researchers has helped to enrich our understanding of constructs such as pre-task planning, negotiation of meaning, and task engagement.

Finally, some researchers (e.g. Carless, 2004) have conducted evaluations of task-based teaching to investigate the extent to which tasks are successful in achieving their goals and the kinds of problems that teachers experience when trying to implement task-based teaching. The aim of such evaluations has been to establish to what extent tasks constitute effective devices for planning and teaching a language course.

Interaction and L2 Learning

If, as Allwright (1984) suggested, interaction is the fundamental fact of the L2 classroom (in the sense that whatever learners learn must be derived from the interactions they experience), then the key question becomes 'In what ways does interaction in the classroom facilitate L2 acquisition?' By and large this question has been addressed by speculating, on the basis of a variety of theories of L2 acquisition, the likelihood of different aspects of interaction creating the conditions needed for acquisition to occur. This is the approach that has been applied to the study of classroom discourse, teacher-talk, learner participation and the choice of tasks, which I consider in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6. Clearly, though, there is also a need for studies that go beyond theory-based hypothesizing to investigate how interaction actually contributes to learning. Chapter 8 examines the research that has attempted this.

One branch of research has investigated whether the kinds of interaction that arise in the 'communicative classroom' promote acquisition. There is some evidence that they do. Two studies (Beretta and Davies, 1985; Lightbown, 1992) demonstrated that classrooms where the focus is placed on meaning rather than on form are effective in promoting L2 acquisition. However, other studies (e.g. Ellis, 1992; Spada and Lightbown, 1989) suggest there may be limitations to what can be achieved in communicative classrooms.

Other studies have investigated the role that interaction plays in classroom language learning more directly by exploring the extent to which (1) learners attend to linguistic form and (2) the impact this has on acquisition. In other words they have explored these relationships:

$$\text{Interaction} \xrightarrow{(1)} \text{attention to form} \xrightarrow{(2)} \text{acquisition}$$

Two different approaches have been used to investigate these relationships. One draws on sociocultural theory to examine how tasks that elicit 'language-related

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episodes' (i.e. sequences of talk directed at addressing specific linguistic problems that arise in communication) assist language acquisition. Studies by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and Swain and Lapkin (2007), among others, have shown that when language problems are resolved through collaborative interaction, learning takes place. The second approach draws on interactionist-cognitive theories to investigate the effects of 'focus on form' on learning. Loewen (2005), for example, administered tailor-made tests to students who had participated in form-focused episodes that occurred in task-based ESL lessons. He found that learning did result especially when the students self-corrected or demonstrated understanding of the meaning of the forms addressed in the episodes.

Other interactionist-cognitive studies have been experimental in design. They employed what are known as 'focused tasks'. These allow for a pre-test – treatment – post-test design as they make it possible to investigate what effect the performance of the task has on the acquisition of the specific feature targetted by the task. A good example of this approach can be found in studies that have investigated the effects of different kinds of corrective feedback. Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006), for example, investigated the effects of different kinds of corrective feedback in communicative lessons. They found that explicit feedback (e.g. when the teacher corrects a learner error directly and/or provides a brief metalinguistic explanation) is more effective than more implicit feedback by means of recasts (e.g. when the teacher responds to a learner utterance containing an error by reformulating it).

All of these studies investigated incidental acquisition (i.e. the learning that occurs without any deliberate intention to learn). In so doing they address what is one of the main claims of task-based teaching – namely, that learners do not have to be explicitly taught a linguistic feature in order to acquire it. It is in this sense that 'focus on form' contributes to acquisition.

Form-Focused Instruction

In Ellis (2001a) I defined form-focused instruction (FFI) as 'any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form' (pp. 1-2). Defined in this way many of the studies considered in the previous chapter would have to be considered examples of form-focused instruction research. The key distinction, however, is whether the instruction is directed at incidental as opposed to intentional language learning. I have elected to address studies of incidental focus on form under the heading of 'Interaction and L2 Learning', leaving research that has investigated deliberate attempts to teach specific linguistic forms to Chapter 9. Thus, the definition of form-focused instruction that informs Chapter 9 is 'any planned instructional activity that is designed to induce intentional language learning'.

I use the term 'instructional activity' to refer to both materials (i.e. texts, exercises and tasks) and procedures for using the materials (e.g. metalinguistic explanations

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and corrective feedback). These can be usefully considered in terms of four macro-options:

1. *Input-based options* (i.e. instruction that involves the manipulation of the input that learners are exposed to, or are required to process). They include enhanced input (i.e. input with the target feature made salient to the learners, for example, by means of emphatic stress or bolding), and structured input (i.e. input that has been contrived to induce conscious processing of the target feature). These options are all comprehension-based.
2. *Explicit options* (i.e. instruction directed at helping learners develop explicit knowledge of the target structure). They include both direct explicit instruction (i.e. learners are provided with metalinguistic descriptions of the target feature) and indirect explicit instruction (i.e. learners are provided with data illustrating the target feature and are required to 'discover' the rule for themselves).
3. *Production options* (i.e. instruction directed at enabling/inducing learners to produce utterances containing the target structure). Production options can be distinguished in terms of whether they involve text manipulation (for example, fill-in-the-blank exercises) or text creation (for example, situational grammar exercises that involve learners in producing their own sentences). They can also be distinguished in terms of whether they are error-avoiding or error-inducing.
4. *Corrective feedback options*. Corrective feedback can be implicit (for example, recasts) or explicit (for example, overt indication that an error has been committed). It can also be input-providing (for example, recasts or metalinguistic explanations) or output-prompting (for example, requests for clarification or elicitations).

Cutting across these options is the distinction between 'focus on forms' and 'focus on form'. This distinction is not without its problems but broadly speaking it concerns the extent to which the instruction is based on a structural syllabus and employs traditional type exercises or is based on a task-based syllabus containing focused tasks that induce attention to the target forms while the learners are primarily meaning-oriented.

The research investigating FFI has employed a number of different approaches. Early research (e.g. Pica, 1983) sought to compare the order of acquisition in instructed and naturalistic learners. Other studies (e.g. Pienemann, 1984) investigated whether instruction could enable learners to bypass early stages in the sequence of acquisition of specific structures. In the 1990s studies of FFI became more theory-driven, seeking to test specific hypotheses drawn from some theory of L2 acquisition such as VanPatten's (1996) information-processing theory. This theory claimed that FFI would be effective if learners were induced to process features that normally they would overlook in the input they were exposed to.

It is not easy to arrive at clear conclusions about what all the research has shown about the effects of FFI. It is clear that instruction does not work well if it focuses purely on linguistic form (as opposed to form-meaning mapping). It is also clear

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that FFI is often more effective when it is directed at helping learners to use features that they have already partially acquired with greater accuracy rather than entirely new forms. What is less clear is what type of instruction is the most effective. Controversy exists, for example, regarding the relative benefits of input-based as opposed to output-based instruction and of focus on form as opposed to focus on forms. A key issue is whether FFI (of any kind) is effective in helping learners acquire implicit knowledge (i.e. the kind of procedural knowledge needed to engage in fluent communication) or whether it only results in explicit knowledge (i.e. declarative knowledge of L2 rules).

Ultimately if FFI works it does so through the classroom interactions which arise when it is implemented. For this reason, it is important for researchers to examine the 'process' features of the instruction, not just the 'product'. Only a few studies have attempted this.

The Mediating Role of Individual Difference Factors

It is self-evident that although there may be universal aspects to the way instruction unfolds in L2 classrooms and of the effects that different kinds of instruction have on language learning, there will also be differences in how individual learners respond to instruction and what they learn from it. However, there are still relatively few studies that have explored how individual difference factors influence learners' response to instruction in actual classrooms. Chapter 10 examines these studies.

Three major sets of learner factors can be identified (Dörnyei, 2009): cognitive factors such as language aptitude and working memory, affective factors such as language anxiety and willingness to communicate, and motivational factors. There are studies that have investigated how these individual difference factors mediate the effects of instruction. For example, Mackey et al. (2010) investigated the role played by working memory. Studies that have investigated learners' motivation indicate that this influences how they respond to instruction (e.g. Takahashi, 2005), how instruction can lead to demotivation (Ushioda, 1998) and how it affects the way in which individual students respond to a specific task (Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998).

It is unlikely that teachers will be able to systematically adjust their instruction to cater for these differences in learners. An alternative approach, therefore, might be to equip students with the learner strategies they need to benefit from whatever instruction they provide. A number of studies (e.g. Holunga, 1995) have investigated the effects of learner training by identifying specific strategies that are seen as likely to foster learning and then assisting students to use these when performing instructional activities.

In another approach, researchers have tried to identify learner 'types' in order to match different types of learners to different types of instruction. However, such an approach is problematic for two reasons. First, it is virtually impossible to distinguish 'types' that take account of all the individual difference factors. As a result, researchers are obliged to select a single factor (e.g. language aptitude) as the

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basis for distinguishing learners but this may or may not be the crucial factor for a given learner in a particular instructional context. Second, this approach ignores the essential fact that the role played by individual difference factors is a dynamic one. That is, the various factors interact with the social and cognitive processes involved in learning in different ways, at different times, and in different kinds of instructional activities. The most promising approaches, therefore, are those that (1) explore how individual difference factors affect the interactional and learning processes that take place as learners grapple with different kinds of instructional activities and (2) provide rich case studies of how individual learners respond to instruction.

Conclusion

Language teaching has been the object of intense enquiry over the years and, not surprisingly, there has been an enormous amount of research that has investigated various aspects of it – much of it completed since Chaudron's (1988) book. While some of this research has been driven by theoretical issues in second language acquisition research (SLA), much (perhaps most) of it has had a pedagogical motivation – that is, it was carried out with a view to gaining a better understanding of the practice of language teaching and how it can be improved. The question arises therefore 'What value does language teaching research have for teachers?'

SLA researchers have expressed reservations about applying their theories and research to language teaching (see, for example, Lightbown, 1985a and 2000). Classroom researchers have expressed greater confidence. Chaudron (1988), for example, concluded his book with the claim that L2 classroom research has 'an important role' to play in both language teaching and language teacher education. However, the problems of applying research to language teaching remain even when the research is classroom-based. The essential problem is the extent to which the findings derived from the study of *one* instructional context can be generalized to *other* instructional contexts. It is now acknowledged that what works in one context may not work in another. This is not just a problem for descriptive studies of specific classrooms but also for experimental studies that employ inferential statistics in order to claim generalizability. Such studies are still sited in specific instructional contexts and thus cannot claim to inform instruction in general. What is needed, then, is a principled way of making use of the research – one that takes account of the fact that the findings of any one study (or even several taken together) can never be more than 'provisional specifications' (Stenhouse, 1975). I conclude the book, in Chapter 11, with a discussion of ways in which the language teaching research reviewed in the rest of the book can inform language teaching.