CHAPTER 6: SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Content adapted from Lightbown and Spada (2006)
Six proposals for classroom teaching

• What is the best way to promote language learning in classrooms?

• In this chapter, we will

  ✤ examine six proposals for second and foreign language teaching

  ✤ provide examples from classroom interaction to illustrate how the proposals are practiced

  ✤ discuss research findings that help to assess their effectiveness
Six proposals for classroom teaching

The 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
1. Get it right from the beginning

Although *communicative language teaching* has come to dominate in some environments, the *structure based* approaches (especially the grammar translation method) remain widespread.
1. Get it right from the beginning

The Grammar Translation Method:

- The grammar translation method is an old approach.
- It has its origin in the teaching of classical languages (e.g. Greek and Latin).
1. Get it right from the beginning

Characteristics of the Grammar Translation approach:

According to Richards and Rodgers (1986),

1. Vocabulary lists, often accompanied by translation equivalents

2. Focus on grammar rules

3. Reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking and listening.

4. Vocabulary selection is based solely on the reading texts used, and words are taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study, and memorization.
1. Get it right from the beginning

Characteristics of the Grammar Translation approach (Cont.):

5. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Much of the lesson is devoted to translating sentences from and into the target language.

6. Accuracy is emphasized.

7. Grammar is taught deductively, that is, by presentation and study of grammar rules.

8. The student's native language is the medium of instruction.
1. Get it right from the beginning

Its purpose:

- To help students read literature rather than to develop fluency in the spoken language.

- It was believed that this approach provided students with good mental exercise to help develop their intellectual and academic abilities.
1. Get it right from the beginning

How does a Grammar Translation class look like?

- Students read a text together line by line
- They are asked to translate it from the TL into their L1.
- They may answer comprehension questions based on the passage, often in their L1.
- The teacher draws attention to a specific grammar rule that is illustrated by the text (e.g., a certain verb form).
- Following this, the students are given an exercise in which they are asked to practice the grammatical rule by filling in the blanks with the appropriate verb form in series of sentences that may or may not be related to the text they have read and translated.
1. Get it right from the beginning

The Audiolingual Method:

• Audiolingual instruction arose 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.

• The audiolingual approach is based on behaviourism and contrastive analysis (habit formation, drills, repetition, distinguishing minimal pairs and similar sounds, etc)
1. Get it right from the beginning

Characteristics of the Audi-lingual Method (Prator & Celce-Murcia 1979):

1. New material is presented in dialogue form;

2. There is dependence on mimicry and memorization of set phrases

3. Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills;

4. There is little or no grammatical explanation. Grammar grammar is taught inductively not deductively;

5. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context;
1. Get it right from the beginning

7. There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids;

8. Great importance is attached to pronunciation;

9. Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted;

10. Successful responses are immediately reinforced;

11. There is a great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances;

12. There is a tendency to manipulate language and disregard content.
1. Get it right from the beginning

- Even though the focus 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.

- According to this view, errors could become habits (habit formation).

- So it is better to prevent these bad habits before they happen.
1. Get it right from the beginning

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!)
1. Get it right from the beginning

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.)
1. Get it right from the beginning

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.
Research findings

The grammar translation approach is useful for the intensive study of grammar and vocabulary and for understanding important texts.

The audiolingual approach was used successfully with highly motivated adult learners in training programmes for government personnel in the United States.

However, there is little research to support such approaches for students in ordinary school programmes who have different levels of motivation and aptitude.

The traditional grammar translation and audiolingual methods frequently failed to produce fluency and accuracy in second language learners.

This led to the development of more communicative approaches.
1. Get it right from the beginning

**Research findings**

Supporters of the communicative based approaches were against the structure based approach. Why? What is their argument?

Supporters of communicative language teaching argue that:

1. language is not learned by the gradual accumulation of one item after another (e.g. Isolated vocabulary lists and grammatical rules)

2. errors are a natural and valuable part of the language learning process.

3. the motivation of learners is often ruined by an insistence on correctness in the earliest stages of second language learning.

4. it is better to encourage learners to develop 'fluency before 'accuracy'.

1. Get it right from the beginning

Research findings

Some researchers and educators criticized the version of communicative language teaching that advocates an exclusive focus on meaning. What was their main criticism/argument?

They argue that allowing learners too much 'freedom' without correction and explicit instruction will lead to early fossilization of errors.
Research findings

• It is difficult to test the hypothesis that focus on form in the early stages of second language learning will, in the long run, lead to better results than those achieved when the focus 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. Why?

  ✷ On the one hand, there are many parts of the world where one finds only structure-based approaches to language teaching. 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, in other parts of the world, it is very difficult to make comparisons with classrooms that are primarily structure-based because such classes simply do not exist (communicative teaching is used instead)
1. Get it right from the beginning

**Research findings**

None the less, some findings from second language classroom research can help us in assessing 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)

- Comparisons of the development of second language proficiency between groups of students receiving different combinations of form- and MEANING-BASED INSTRUCTION (Study 13).
2 Just listen ... and read

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 48 college students enrolled in French language courses at an American university.
Study 13: Grammar plus communicative practice

**Procedure:**

- The students were divided into three groups:
  - A 'communicative' group
  - A 'culture' group
  - A CONTROL GROUP.
Study 13: Grammar plus communicative practice

Procedure (Cont.):

- All groups received about four hours per week of audio lingual 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.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 13: Grammar plus communicative practice

**Procedure (Cont.):**

- 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.
Study 13: Grammar plus communicative practice

Findings:

At the end of the period of instruction,

1. There were no SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES between groups on the linguistic competence measures.

2. However, the communicative group scored significantly higher than the other two groups on the four communicative tests developed for the study.

Conclusion:

1. Second language programmes that focus only on accuracy and form do not give students sufficient opportunity to develop communication abilities in a second language.

2. Opportunities for freer communication did not cause learners to do less well on measures of linguistic accuracy.
This proposal is based on the hypothesis that language acquisition takes place when learners are exposed to comprehensible input through listening and/or reading.

The individual whose name is most closely associated with this proposal is ....

**Stephen Krashen**

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 in Example 3, p. 144.
2 Just listen ... and read

- 'Just listen ... and read' is a controversial proposal for second language teaching.

- It not only says that second language learners do not need to drill and practice language in order to learn it, but also that they do not need to speak at all.

- According to this view, it is enough to hear and understand the TL.

- The classroom description in Example 3 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 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.
2 Just listen ... and read

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.

• However, graded reading materials 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.
Study 15: Reading for words

• 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.

Procedure:

• 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.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 15: Reading for words

Findings:

1. There was vocabulary growth attributable to reading, even over this short period.

2. The more students read, the more words they learned.

Conclusion

She concluded that

- substantial vocabulary growth through reading is possible.

- However, students must read a great deal (more than just one or two books per semester) to realize those benefits.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 15: Reading for words

• 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).

- TPR was developed by James Asher (1972)
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 16: Total physical response

How does a TPR class look like?

- In TPR classes, students (children or adults) participate in activities in which they hear a series of commands in the TL.
  - e.g. 'stand up', 'put the book or 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.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 16: Total physical response

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.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 16: Total physical response

- 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' (providing high-frequency exposure to specific language features)
- 'enhanced input' (enhancing the features in some way)
- 'processing instruction' (providing explicit instruction)

In these studies, efforts have been made to draw second language learners' attention to language forms in different ways.

The emphasis 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.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 17: Input flood

Procedure:

- 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.
Study 17: Input flood

Findings:

• 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.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 17: Input flood

Lydia White's (1991) conclusion:

- 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).
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 17: Input flood

• 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'.
2 Just listen ... and read

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.
2 Just listen ... and read

**Study 18: Enhanced input**

- In a study involving enhanced input, Joanna White (1998) examined the acquisition of possessive determiners (specifically 'his' and 'her') by French-speaking learners in intensive ESL classes aged 11-12.

**Procedure:**

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.
Study 18: Enhanced input

There was a major difference between this study and Trahey and White's input flood. What is it?

*Typographical enhancement* was added.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 18: Enhanced input

What does it mean?

Every time a possessive determiner appeared in the texts, it was in bold type, underlined, italicized, or written in capital letters.

What was the hypothesis behind using typographical enhancement?

The hypothesis was that this would lead the learners to notice the possessive determiners as they read the texts.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 18: Enhanced input

Procedure (Cont.):

White compared the performance of learners who had read the typographically enhanced passages with that of learners who read the same texts without enhancement.

Finding:

Both groups improved in their knowledge and use of these forms but there was little difference between them.
2 Just listen ... and read

Study 18: Enhanced input

• 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).
Interpreting the research

- Research on comprehension-based approaches to second language acquisition shows that learners can make considerable progress if they continued getting exposed to language they understand.

- The evidence also suggests, however, that comprehension-based learning may best be seen as
  - an excellent way to begin learning
  - as a valuable supplement to other kinds of learning for more advanced learners.
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' (to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc.) in a way that permits them to arrive at mutual understanding.
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.

Example 4, p. 150
3 Let's talk

• 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 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

- In the mid-1990s researchers began to explore the effects of interaction on second language production and development over time.

- Most of these studies are motivated by Michael Long's (1996) updated version of the interaction hypothesis.

How is this updated version different from the original one?

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 (e.g. attention)

- and features of interaction facilitate learning (e.g. corrective feedback)
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**. What were they?

1. 'Collaborative' interaction consisted of two learners fully engaged with each other's ideas

2. 'dominant-dominant' interaction was characterized by an unwillingness on the part of either learner to engage and/or agree with the other's contributions;

3. 'dominant-passive' interaction consisted of one learner who was authoritarian and another who was willing to yield to the other speaker;

4. 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.
3 Let's talk

Study 22: The dynamics of pair work

- 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.

Findings:

- 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.
Study 22: The dynamics of pair work

Conclusion:

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.
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.

- 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.
4 Two for one

- In immersion and CLIL programmes, students (or their parents) choose to receive content-based instruction in a second language.

- In many educational situations, however, no other option is available.

- e.g.

  - In some countries, the only language of schooling is the language of a previous colonial power. (e.g. African countries - French, Dutch, English, etc)

  - In others, educational materials are not available in all local languages, so one language is chosen as the language of education (e.g. Arabic materials in Iraq even for Kurdish speakers).

  - In countries of immigration, students often have access to schooling only through the majority language. (e.g. Kurdish immigrants studying in Australia)
Research findings

• In many contexts for content-based instruction, it is simply assumed that students will develop both their academic skills and second language abilities.

• In recent years, researchers have sought to examine this assumption more critically.
4 Two for one

Interpreting the research

Advantages of Content-based instruction

1. It increases the amount of time for learners to be exposed to the new language.

2. It creates a genuine need to communicate, motivating students to acquire language in order to understand the content.

3. For older students, 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.
Interpreting the research

Disadvantages of Content-based instruction

1. Students may need several years before their ability to use the language for cognitively challenging academic material has reached an age-appropriate level.

2. For students from minority groups, this delay can have lasting negative effects on their first language as we saw in the discussion of subtractive bilingualism.

3. Although immersion programme students are able to communicate with some fluency in the L2, students often fall short of the high levels of linguistic accuracy that their years of schooling in the language might predict.
Interpreting the research

In recent years, proponents of content-based instruction have stressed the need to recall that content-based language teaching is still language teaching.

Many 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 has 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, his research provides evidence that some linguistic structures (e.g. basic word order in sentences) develop along a predictable order.
5 Teach what is teachable

• 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 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.

• Researchers supporting this view also claim that certain other aspects of language (e.g. individual vocabulary items) can be taught at any time.
5 Teach what is teachable

- In Example 6, 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.

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 (a Stage 3 behavior). The teacher's corrective feedback leads the students to imitate a Stage 4 question.

**Example 7**

The same group of students engaged in 'Famous person' interviews.

Sl 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?
5 Teach what is teachable

Research findings

1. The 'Teach what is teachable' view suggests that while some features of language can be taught successfully at various points in the learners' development (e.g. Isolated vocabulary items), other features develop following a predictable order (e.g. Word order and grammatical morphemes).

2. 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.

Next, we are going to examine some studies that have tested this hypothesis.
5 Teach what is teachable

**Study 28: Ready to learn**

- Manfred Pienemann (1988) conducted a study investigating the acquisition of German as a foreign language.
- Two groups of Australian university students.
- They were at Stage 2 in their acquisition of German word order.

**Procedure:**

- They were taught the rules associated with Stage 3 and Stage 4 respectively.
  - Group 1 was taught Stage 3 rules.
  - Group 2 was taught Stage 4 rules.
- The instruction took place over two weeks.
Study 28: Ready to learn

Findings:

1. The learners who received instruction on Stage 3 moved easily into this stage from Stage 2.

2. However, 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.

Conclusion:

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.
Proponents of the 'Get it right in the end' position:

- recognize the importance of form-focused instruction, but they do not assume that everything has to be taught.

- believe that many language features are acquired naturally if learners have:
  - adequate exposure to the language
  - and a motivation to learn.

- agree with advocates of the 'Teach what is teachable' position that some things cannot be taught if the teaching doesn't take the student's readiness (stage of development) into account.

So, they view meaning-focused instruction (comprehension-based, content-based, task-based, etc) as important for language learning

But they also believe that learners will do better if they also have access to some form-focused instruction.
Examples 10, 11, and 12 are taken from a classroom where a group of 12-year-old French speakers are learning English.

In example 10, the following sentence has been placed on the board,

'Sometimes my mother makes good cakes'.

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

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!
6 Get it right in the end

Proponents of 'Get it right in the end':

• argue that what learners focus on eventually lead to changes in their interlanguage 'systems.

• However, they do not claim that
  • focusing on particular language points will prevent learners from making errors
  • learners will begin using a form as soon as it is taught

• Rather, they suggest that the focused instruction will lead learners to notice the target features in subsequent input.
6 Get it right in the end

Proponents of 'Get it right in the end' (Cont.):

- For them, form-focused instruction
  - doesn't always involve metalinguistic explanations
  - learners are not 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 speakers.
• 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.

**Example 11**

• The students are practising following instructions; one student instructs, others colour.

Sl 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' and with determining grammatical gender in English.

• 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 interlanguage stage.

S 1 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.

S 1 Is George in the living room?

T Yeah.

S 1 I win!

- Note that the teacher's brief intervention does not distract the student from his pleasure in the game, which demonstrates that focus on form does not have to interfere with genuine interaction.
In recent years, many studies were conducted to examine this proposal.
6 Get it right in the end

Study 33: Focusing on sociolinguistic forms in French immersion

Presentation
6 Get it right in the end

**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 old) were given focused instruction on a grammatical feature that is known to be a persistent problem for French immersion students—grammatical gender.

- For 20 minutes a day over a five-week period these children carried out many activities based on children's games 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 (e.g. *-ette* in *la bicyclette* for feminine, and *-eau* in *le bateau* for masculine).
Study 34: Focusing on gender in French immersion

- The students were pre-tested on their knowledge of grammatical gender via listening and speaking tests
  - before the instruction began
  - immediately after instruction
  - and then again five months later.
Study 34: Focusing on gender in French immersion

- 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 for the students.
6 Get it right in the end

Interpreting the research

The previous studies 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.
6 Get it right in the end

The implications of classroom research for teaching

• Many questions have been raised by the research to test the hypotheses that the different proposals represent.

• It seems evident that proposals representing an almost exclusive focus on meaning or 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.
6 Get it right in the end

The implications of classroom research for teaching

• 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.
The implications of classroom research for teaching

- 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 evidence that learners make considerable progress in both comprehension and production in comprehension-based programmes, there is no 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 implications of classroom research for teaching

• The 'Let's talk' proposal raises similar concerns.

• Opportunities for learners to engage in conversational interactions in group and paired activities 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.
The implications of classroom research for teaching

- 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.
6 Get it right in the end

The implications of classroom research for teaching

• 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.
The implications of classroom research for teaching

- 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 classroom research for teaching

- 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 TL 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.
References


Thank you