

- *Cognitive Strategies.* These include grouping and classifying, using dictionaries and other external resources, notetaking, visually representing the material through charts, diagrams, and so on, rehearsing, and forming hypotheses and testing them out.
- *Socioaffective Strategies.* These include asking for clarification, repeating, imitating, circumlocuting, cooperating, and engaging in private speech.

One common approach to strategy instruction has been to directly teach these different strategies to learners. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) and Oxford (1990), for example, have developed instructional models for the assessment of students' strategy use and the explicit instruction of effective strategy use. The goal of such overt instruction is to make learners aware of the variety of ways they can help themselves to learn so that they can become increasingly self-directed and ultimately assume full responsibility for their involvement in the process.

Without denying that the overt instruction of strategies can be beneficial, the evidence on learning and classroom discourse makes clear that strategy learning also occurs as an outcome of teacher-student interaction in classroom activities. In their interactions with students, teachers play an especially important role in helping them develop and manage particular strategies for learning. By modeling effective strategy use and scaffolding student participation in their use across the four kinds of learning opportunities, for example, teachers assist learners in the development of a wide range of important strategies for directing their own learning.

Studies of learning in four different foreign language classrooms illustrate this connection between classroom interaction and strategy development. Through the use of a performance-based portfolio assessment tool Donato and McCormick (1994) show how university students learning French were "purposefully socialized into constructing their own strategy learning through dialogue with self and teacher and connections to actual evidence of their growing abilities" (p. 463). During the semester, students were asked to create portfolios in which they regularly reflected on and provided evidence for the strategies they used in learning. The authors argue that "the systematic act of documenting and thinking about performance is the catalyst and mediator for developing and sharpening one's strategies" (p. 462). Rather than being taught learning strategies apart from their experiences, these students were learning how best to learn within the context of their learning activities. Documenting and reflecting on the specific steps they undertook as they went about learning not only promoted critical awareness of the process, but also the appropriation of the strategies they needed to be successful learners.

Another study provides evidence of strategy learning through context-based classroom interaction. In their study of elementary-grade students learning Japanese, Takahashi, Austin, and Morimoto (2000) show how students appropriated one particularly useful strategy initially used by the teacher to help themselves and each other remember previously learned material. In this case, it was the singing aloud of the mnemonic song, "Tai (I want)" that helped students remember certain syntactic features. At the beginning of the year, it was the teacher who sang the song to the students to help cue their recall of specific learned items. The authors show how, as the year progressed, the students used the song themselves to help cue their own memories and those of their peers by singing the song aloud whenever assistance was needed. The authors argue that the singing of the song, learned through their interactions with the teacher, is a compelling indication of the students' appropriation of an important learning strategy.

In addition to appropriating strategies made available to them in classroom discourse, students have been shown to be quite resourceful in creating their own effective learning strategies. In a study of a high school Spanish as a foreign language classroom (Brooks & Donato, 1994), it was shown how students used their first language, English, to help themselves and each other carry out an unfamiliar and difficult task in Spanish. Members of one small group, for example, used English to figure out how to do the task (e.g., “Am I supposed to tell you and you write stuff on your paper?”), and to come up with an appropriate word in Spanish (e.g., “Solamente.”, “Ah! Solamente. That’s a good word!”). The researchers concluded that the students’ use of English served as a useful learning strategy, helping them organize, plan, and coordinate theirs and each other’s behaviors in the accomplishment of the task.

As a final example, in the study mentioned earlier by Ohta (2000), it was shown how individual students used private speech as a strategy for mediating their learning in a whole-group activity. Examining utterances learners addressed to themselves, Ohta found that these individuals used both teacher and student utterances they heard addressed to others in large-group interaction as a basis for comparing and reformulating their own responses. By repeating or recasting utterances heard in the interaction between the teacher and other students, Ohta argues, individual learners created their own learning strategies, and thus actively pursued learning, even though they were not the direct focus of the teacher’s interactional attention.

In summary, these studies have shown that in addition to the direct teaching of language-learning strategies, students can develop a range of effective strategy use through active, conscious involvement in their classroom activities with the teacher and other students. Even the strategies the youngest learners are able to engage in, indeed, can help to construct intellectually rich interactions in which they are able to mediate their own learning and that of their peers without the explicit help or directed attention of the teacher. Thus, it is essential to provide opportunities in our classroom interactions that enhance the strategic development of learners’ ingenuity and skill in the process of learning.

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## THE ROLE OF L1 IN THE L2 CLASSROOM

Traditionally, foreign language teaching methods have urged the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom from the beginning levels of instruction (Krashen, 1982, 1985; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). In fact, according to Howatt (1984), avoiding the use of L1 has been a feature of foreign language teaching methods for much of the 20th century. Discouraging the use of English by both teachers and students was thought to be beneficial in helping learners keep the two languages separate while developing a reliance on the target language.

The notion of multicompetence (Cook, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1999b) and current research on language development (e.g., Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Genesee, Nicoladis, & Paradis, 1995; Nicoladis & Genesee, 1996), however, make this position problematic. As Cook (1992) notes, “This [position] is reminiscent of the way of teaching deaf children language by making them sit on their hands so that they cannot use sign language” (p. 584). As we know, learners’ first language is always present in their minds as they are

learning the second language. Indeed, the two systems are so closely linked that what one does or learns to do in one has a significant impact on what one can do and learns to do in the other (Cook, 1992).

The study of language use by students in a secondary Spanish class by Brooks and Donato (1994), noted previously, highlights the cognitive links existing between learners' first language and the target language. As pointed out earlier, the Spanish learners' use of English helped them orient to, and become involved in, a Spanish language task. As they gained experience and grew comfortable with what needed to be done in the task, their use of English decreased. Thus, as the researchers point out, the learners' use of English did not hinder their learning of Spanish. Rather, it facilitated it by helping them mediate their involvement in their instructional activities.

Along similar lines, Anton and DiCamilla (1998) examined the use of English and Spanish among beginning-level adult learners of Spanish working in small groups to complete a written composition. They found that the learners used their first language, English, in their conversations as a way to hold their collective attention and together figure out how to say something in Spanish. Excerpt 6 shows how two students used English to help themselves and each other access forms and construct a sentence in Spanish.

**Excerpt 6 (from Anton & DiCamilla, 1998, p. 322)**

G: Or do you want to just say in the afternoon?

D: Let's say . . .

G: Por la tarde?

D: Let's just do 'por . . . la tarde . . .'

G: Por la tarde . . . comen . . . what do they eat?

D: Um . . . frutas.

Anton and DiCamilla (1998) conclude that in addition to helping students access particular forms in Spanish, their use of L1 helped them to maintain intersubjectivity, or a shared understanding of the task. Both functions were instrumental in helping the students successfully complete the task.

Findings from these studies confirm the important roles that learners' first languages play in bilingual development. It should be noted that the resourcefulness of L1 is not limited to its use by students. Teachers can also use it as a tool in teaching. In fact, Cook (2000) suggests several ways for teachers to incorporate the systematic use of L1 into L2 classrooms. For example, it can be used to convey meaning about a particular concept or term, to explain a grammar point, and to organize the class for learning when the cost of using the target language is too great (e.g., giving instructions, checking homework, and so on). English can also be used to brainstorm vocabulary and other kinds of sociocultural and pragmatic information that students may need to know to complete a task.

According to Cook (2000), several factors need to be considered when deciding on the language to use in a particular activity. Two of the more important include the following:

- Efficiency: Can the activity be carried out more effectively through the use of L1?
- Facilitation of learning: Will using the L1 help students in the learning of the target language?

In deciding whether to use English in the target language classroom, Cook advises that benefits from the use of L1 must always be compared to potential loss of L2 experience. He concludes that although the use of L1 is clearly beneficial to learning the second language, everything else being equal, it is always good to use the L2 as much as possible.

More research on the uses to which teachers and students put English and the target language as they engage in their classroom activities will certainly help make their connections even clearer. For now, it seems safe to assume that using English in the foreign language classroom will not retard or unduly restrict the learning of the target language. Rather, when used to help learners mediate their involvement in their classroom activities, it can promote their learning of the other language.

## LINGUISTIC AND INTERACTIVE MEANS FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY

Much of this chapter has focused on the cognitive dimensions of classroom discourse and their role in learning. However, as we know, **affective dimensions** of learning are equally important in creating effectual communities of learners. These include feelings of group affiliation and solidarity as well as personal autonomy and confidence. This chapter concludes with a discussion on some ways in which a positive classroom community can be constructed through discourse.

First, affirm student responses. Affirmation involves listening to the students with understanding and empathy, striving to understand their points of view, and incorporating their contributions into the larger discussion. Affirmations can occur through the use of back channel cues such as “oh,” “uh huh,” and “mmm,” which let students know that they are being listened to. They can also occur through repetitions, recasts, or reformulations of student utterances. What makes these utterances affirmations is the way that the teacher conveys respect for the student’s contribution through the use of tone and other paralinguistic cues and at the same time makes it clear that the authorship of the utterance is left with the student.

In Nystrand’s (1997) study of classroom discourse, mentioned earlier, a close examination of the discourse of one exemplary ninth-grade English teacher whose students not only participated actively in the interaction but also appeared to enjoy their involvement revealed that this teacher frequently and consistently affirmed students’ contributions. Likewise, in the Verplaetse (2000) study, also mentioned earlier, affirmation of student contributions was found to be a frequently used strategy by the middle school teacher Verplaetse had called “Mr. Wonderful.” In addition to making students feel valued, such discursive actions help to foster students’ feelings of autonomy, which, in turn, lead to heightened student interest and motivation in learning (Cooper & Simonds, 1998; van Lier, 1996).

Second, use language to create group bonds and rapport. When referring to classroom activities use inclusive pronouns such as “we” and “us.” Use “let’s” as an alternative to an imperative, and vary intonational patterns, voice pitch, loudness, and tempo to express immediacy or positive affect (Cooper & Simonds, 1998).

Third, use humor and allow students to use humor to reduce tension, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, or to entertain. It should be remembered, however, that while the use of humor can strengthen the interpersonal bonds between classroom members, when used

incorrectly, it can also serve to create divisiveness. Because middle and high school students are especially sensitive to anything that might, even loosely, be perceived as criticism, it is important to use humor with care.

An example from a high school Spanish classroom, taken from Hall (1995), illustrates how the use of humor at the expense of one student can lead to embarrassment and even humiliation. The interaction between a teacher and student found in Excerpt 7 occurred after the teacher had spent several minutes asking the questions *te gusta tocar* (do you like to play [an instrument]) and *te gusta comer* (do you like to eat) to several students.

### Excerpt 7

1. T:           pero te gusta, Monica, te gusta comer gatos te gusta comer gatos  
(*but do you like, Monica, do you like to eat cats*)
2. Monica:    sí  
(*yes*)
3. T:           sí o no, sí, ok, me gusta, me gusta  
(*yes or no, yes, ok, I like, I like*)
4. Monica:    me gusta  
(*I like*)
5. T:           comer gatos  
(*to eat cats*)
6. Monica:    comer gatos  
(*to eat cats*)
7. T:           comprendes comer comer yum yum gatos Sylvester, Garfield  
(*do you understand to eat to eat yum yum cats.*)
8. Student:   cats!
9. T:           sí, a Monica le gusta comer gatos  
(*yes, Monica likes to eat cats*)
10. Student:   she likes to eat cats?
11. T:           sí, por supuesto  
(*yes, of course*)
12. Students:  (laughter, simultaneous talk)
13. Student:   (to Monica) you been eatin cats
14. Monica:   no
15. T:           no ahh no ok no me  
(*no ahh no ok I don't*)
16. Monica:   (*very softly*) no me  
(*I don't*)
17. T:           comer gatos, sí, no me gusta comer gatos bueno Monica, sí. A mi me gusta comer gatos en pizza, en pizza, solo en pizza, solo en pizza  
(*eat cats, yes, I don't eat cats, good, Monica, yes. I like to eat cats on pizza, on pizza, only on pizza, only on pizza*)

As we see in line 1, the teacher asks Monica whether she likes to eat cats. Apparently thinking that, like the students before her, she was being asked if she could eat something that was edible, Monica replies with a “yes.” The teacher then repeats the entire utterance, evidently to get Monica to repeat it as well, which she does in lines 4 and 6. Perhaps because he thinks it is funny and wants the other students to share in the humor, the teacher, with the help of a student who translates the teacher’s utterance into English, brings Monica’s response to the attention of the entire class in lines 9 and 11. As we see in lines 12 and 13, this calls forth laughter and some teasing from other students. Unfortunately, the humor is at the expense of Monica, who realizing what the teacher led her to say, attempts to change her answer. However, she does not engage in the laughter. Rather, she repeats the teacher’s utterances softly and, once this interaction is over, does not attempt to participate again.

While it is very likely that the teacher did not intend to embarrass Monica in front of the class, encouraging students to laugh at her attempt to participate did just that. As this excerpt and findings from other studies on the role of humor in language learning demonstrate, to engender feelings of affiliation and group support, the premises on which the humor is based must be shared among all the members rather than just a few (Consolo, 2000; Duff, 2000; Sullivan, 2000). It must also be used to enhance goodwill rather than to rebuke, punish, tease, or make a point.

A final way to foster a positive learning environment has to do with the creation and management of classroom norms and expectations for learning. Given the diversity of life experiences that students bring to the classroom, it is likely that they may have different understandings of appropriate classroom behavior. Differences across national culture groups have been well documented. However, differences can exist even across seemingly similar groups of people.

For example, in many locations in the southeastern United States, it is expected that students address their teachers and other persons of authority using “Sir” or “Ma’am.” This is not the expectation, however, in other sections of the United States. Likewise, in some areas, overlapped talk, where one person begins talking before the speaker is finished, is common and thus treated as appropriate conversational behavior. In other places, where it is expected that one person finishes talking fully before another begins talking, such overlapped talk could be interpreted as “interruptions” and thus considered rude or inappropriate.

The important point is not that there is one right way of behaving. Rather, it is to work collectively with the students to decide upon norms for classroom behavior, to articulate them clearly, and to follow them consistently and fairly across all individuals and situations. Explicit, consistent expectations provide a stable, safe learning environment. Safe learning environments, in turn, enhance learners’ self-confidence, their interest in learning, and their interest in building strong interpersonal relationships with each other and the teacher.

## SUMMARY

Classroom discourse is an essential component of all learning environments. In foreign language classrooms, because the language to be learned is both the object of pedagogical attention and the primary medium of communication, the interaction that occurs between

teachers and students, and among students, is especially significant to creating effective communities of language learners. Consequently, understanding key concepts and terms associated with classroom discourse as well as how to construct different patterns of discourse to effect different learning outcomes is a crucial aspect of pedagogical content knowledge for foreign language teachers. A brief summary of some of the key issues relating to classroom discourse presented in this chapter is provided here.

- The initiation–response–evaluation (IRE) is the most common pattern of classroom interaction found in Western schooling contexts. Its use typically exemplifies a transmission model of teaching in which the focus is on delivering a body of knowledge to learners. It more often facilitates teacher control rather than student involvement, and when used exclusively, severely limits student learning.
- Based on Vygotsky’s notion of scaffolding, instructional conversations are a cognitively rich pattern of discourse that actively assists learners’ understanding and ability to communicate about significant concepts and ideas. While they are primarily teacher-directed, instructional conversations (ICs) are also jointly constructed with learners. That is, learners have ample opportunities not only to actively participate but also to lead the teacher and fellow students in their intellectually challenging conversations. ICs typically involve seven communicative actions: modeling, feeding back, contingency managing, directing, questioning, explaining, and task structuring.
- Teacher questions play a particularly critical role in scaffolding learner involvement in classroom interactions. In their questions, teachers need to challenge learners to think, to draw on what they know, and connect it to what they are learning. In addition, when constructing questions it is important to make clear connections between the questions asked and the instructional goals, and to provide a variety of ways for students to participate in the ongoing interaction.
- Much research on second language acquisition has investigated the roles of teacher input, teacher–student and student–student negotiated interaction, and student output in facilitating student learning of lexical and syntactic forms. In general, findings from the various strands of research have provided useful information on how to construct interaction in overt instructional activities in ways that help students to notice or become aware of, actively reflect on, and ultimately gain control of the various aspects of the target language.
- Recent research on learning strategies shows that in addition to being directly taught strategies for learning, students also acquire them through their active involvement in classroom interaction. Not only do they appropriate strategies that teachers use in the context of their instructional interactions, but they also devise their own strategies in response to their individual needs. Providing time for students to document and reflect on their use of strategies helps them become more aware of their own learning process, and ultimately, more capable language learners.
- Recent research on the use of English in foreign language classrooms has raised questions about traditional assumptions restricting the use of anything but the target language. Findings show, for example, that the use of English helps learners access new forms and functions in the second language and integrate the new knowledge into what they already know. While more research is needed, we can acknowledge

the beneficial cognitive role that English can play in helping students mediate their learning of the target language.

- Finally, affective dimensions of learning are as important as cognitive dimensions. Thus, creating effective communities of language learners requires the use of particular patterns of discourse that foster the development of positive affect, group solidarity, and interpersonal bonds. Some communicative resources for doing so include the use of respectful, affirming responses to student contributions, and of personal pronouns such as “we” and “us.” It also involves using humor to foster friendliness and goodwill among all class members, and collectively establishing and adhering to a common set of guidelines for classroom behavior.