Chapter 1 Summary

Understanding the Role of Contextualized Input, Output, and Interaction in Language Learning

Chapter 1 presents a discussion of key theoretical positions that attempt to explain the role of contextualized input, output, and interaction in the language learning process in order to answer the questions “How do people learn languages?” and “What does it mean to know a language?” We posit a framework based on sociocultural theory to acknowledge that language-learning processes are as much social as they are cognitive.

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Universal Grammar
- competence vs. performance
- communicative competence
- Krashen’s Input Hypothesis
- acquisition vs. learning
- input processing
- variability in performance
- Interlanguage Theory
- Long’s Interaction Hypothesis
- negotiation of meaning
- Swain’s Output Hypothesis
- sociocultural theory
- Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development
- scaffolding
- mediation
- language play
- interactional competence
- affect and motivation

Observe and Reflect: Observing a Child Interacting in His/Her Native Language (L1); Alternative Observation of a Child Interacting in His/Her Native Language (L1); Observing a Beginning Language (L2) Class

Discuss and Reflect: Creating Real Conversational Models

CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

Research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has offered the field of language teaching valuable insights into the nature of language learning (Dulay & Burt, 1977; Ellis, 1997; Gass, 1979; Gass, Lee, & Roots, 2007; Hall, 1997, 1999; Krashen, 1982; Schulz, 1991; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993). By studying SLA research, teachers are able to examine critically the principles upon which they base foreign language instruction. We will use the term language learning to refer to the process of learning a language other than the native language in either a natural or classroom setting. The term target language (TL) is used to refer to the language of instruction in the classroom. The term L1 refers to the first or native language and the term L2 refers to the second language or TL being studied.

Early SLA research examined how individual language learners use their intellect to acquire a second language within experimental settings and classrooms—i.e., acquisition as a cognitive process that occurs in the individual’s brain (Chomsky, 1968; Corder, 1973). More recent SLA research conducted in settings within and beyond classrooms (e.g., study abroad, in TL communities) has studied how language use and social interaction bring about acquisition—i.e., acquisition as a social process that occurs during interaction with others (Firth & Wagner, 1997, 2007; Hall, 1997; Swain & Deters, 2007). We divided the research themes into two categories: those that view language learning as an individual achievement and those that view language learning as a collaborative achievement within a community of learners. This distinction helps teachers to understand language acquisition from a cognitive and social point of view, and it provides a lens through which the evolution of research and thinking in the field can be examined.
Language Learning as an Individual (Cognitive) Achievement

From Behaviorism to Cognitive Psychology: Communicative Competence

In the 1940s and 1950s, a behaviorist view of language learning (Skinner, 1957) held that people learn through habit formation by repeatedly associating a stimulus with a response using imitation, practice, and positive reinforcement. By contrast, cognitive theorists, such as Chomsky (1965), observed that children use elements of language they know to say something they have never heard before. He proposed that humans are born with an innate “language acquisition device” (LAD) that enables them to process language. He posited that the LAD contained abstract principles of language that are universal to all languages, referred to as Universal Grammar (Chomsky; Ellis, 1985). When children pay attention to features of the language they hear, the LAD is activated; it triggers and selects the innate rules specific to the language they hear. For example, children who say “I falled down” are overgeneralizing a grammatical rule about formation of past tenses even though they have not heard that irregular form used by family, friends, and others around them; they are creating language based on what they already know. This creative use of language based on meaningful input led Chomsky to distinguish between competence and performance. Chomsky viewed competence as the intuitive knowledge of rules of grammar and syntax and of how the linguistic system of a language operates. Performance, he thought, is the individual’s ability to produce language. In this view, language production results from the creative application of a learned set of linguistic rules.

Chomsky, however, was not concerned with the context in which language is learned or used. His views are considered “innatist” or “nativist” because they explain language learning capacity as being “hard-wired” into the human brain at birth. Foundational to later research was Chomsky’s notion that when children hear large amounts of language as input, they acquire language as a result of their innate ability to discover a language’s underlying system of rules, not because they repeat and imitate language they hear. According to this nativist perspective, children do not acquire language rules that are outside of the boundaries of the Universal Grammar (White, 1996, 2003). An implication of Chomsky’s theory for language instruction is that knowing a language is more than just stringing words together, but rather knowing how language works as a system.

A Broader Notion of Communicative Competence: The Importance of Context

Chomsky’s definition of competence was expanded to “communicative competence,” or the ability to function in a communicative setting by using grammatical knowledge, gestures, intonation, strategies for making oneself understood, and risk-taking in attempting communication, all based on communication within a meaningful context (Bachman, 1990; Campbell & Wales, 1970; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1972). The most recent model of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995), shown in Figure 1.1, consists of discourse competence, which is the way language elements, such as words and phrases, are arranged into utterances to express a coherent idea. Discourse competence is surrounded by sociocultural, linguistic, and actional competence. Sociocultural competence is knowledge about context, stylistic appropriateness, nonverbal factors, and cultural background knowledge; linguistic competence is the ability to make meaning when using form such as morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and spelling; and actional competence is the ability to match linguistic form with the speaker’s intent. These components are sustained by strategic competence, a set of skills that enable people to communicate and compensate for deficiencies in the other competencies.

An implication of communicative competence for language teachers is that students need to know how to:

1. make meaning using grammatical or linguistic forms;
2. use knowledge of sociocultural factors that affect communication;
3. express their ideas and intent;
4. use strategies to communicate with others and compensate for deficiencies in the other competencies.
The Role of Input

Krashen’s Input Hypothesis. Building on some of the innatist views of language learning proposed in Chomsky’s work on acquisition, Krashen (1982) proposed further explanations of how language is acquired in his widely known albeit somewhat controversial Monitor Model:

1. The acquisition-learning hypothesis: Acquisition is defined as a subconscious “picking up” of rules characteristic of the L1 acquisition process. Learning, by contrast, is a conscious focus on knowing and applying rules. Acquisition, not learning, leads to spontaneous, unplanned communication.

2. The monitor hypothesis: The conscious knowledge of rules prompts the internal “monitor” that checks, edits, and polishes language output and is used only when the language user has sufficient time, attends to linguistic form, and knows the rule being applied.

3. The natural order hypothesis: Learners acquire the rules of a language in a predictable sequence, in a way that is independent of the order in which rules may have been taught.

4. The input hypothesis: Acquisition occurs only when learners receive an optimal quantity of comprehensible input that is interesting, a little beyond their current level of competence \( (i + 1) \), and not grammatically sequenced, but understandable using background knowledge, context, and other extralinguistic cues such as gestures and intonation. The “\( i \)” is the current competence of the learner; the “\( 1 \)” represents the next level of competence that is a little beyond where the learner is now (Krashen).

5. The affective filter hypothesis: Language acquisition must take place in an environment where learners are “off the defensive” and the affective filter (anxiety) is low in order for the input to be noticed and reflected upon by the learner (Krashen).

Among these implications of Krashen’s perspectives are that the language classroom should provide comprehensible input at the \( i + 1 \) level, in a low-anxiety environment in which learners are not required to speak until they are ready to do so; input should be interesting, relevant, and not grammatically sequenced; and error correction should be minimal in the classroom since it is not useful when the goal is acquisition.

Krashen’s theory of acquisition and comprehensible input has implications for the teaching of vocabulary. Our understanding of L1 acquisition and input illustrates that children acquire vocabulary as a result of attending to large quantities of meaningful input and by interacting with the concrete objects referred to in the input rather than by studying lists of words in the target language followed by their native language equivalents (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Terrell (1986) refers to this process as binding when learners are given opportunities to make connections between form (i.e., the language they hear) and meaning (i.e., the concrete objects referred to in the input)—

*Binding* is the term I propose to describe the cognitive and affective mental process of linking a meaning to a form. The concept of binding is what language teachers refer to when they insist that a new word ultimately be associated directly with its meaning and not with a translation (p. 214; as cited in Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 39).

Binding can be facilitated during vocabulary acquisition by:

1. presenting vocabulary in meaningful groups (e.g., physical descriptions, clothing, weather);
2. using meaningful visuals and objects so that students can match the TL description to the concrete referents
3. engaging students in demonstrating comprehension and acquisition of vocabulary before actually asking them to produce it orally or in written form. Textbooks increasingly have moved toward using visuals to present vocabulary in order to facilitate binding, as in the example in Figure 1.2 of the destruction and conservation of the environment.

Few would deny that Krashen’s model sparked a great deal of thought and discussion in the profession regarding the role of input in language learning and prompted many language teachers to provide more comprehensible TL input in their classrooms. Nevertheless, many of his claims paint an unclear picture of the role of classroom instruction in language learning and remain to be empirically tested.
Input Processing. Building on Krashen’s views on input, some researchers suggested that when input is simplified and tailored to the level of the learner, learners are able to make connections between form and meaning and thus convert input to intake. Intake is language that is comprehended and used by learners to develop a linguistic system that they then use to produce output in the language. Beginning language learners need structured input activities that enable them to focus on meaning while they pay attention to form before they can use the language to produce output (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993). Research across languages and with a variety of grammatical structures has indicated that instructional strategies that incorporate input are successful in helping learners build linguistic systems (Buck, 2000; Cheng, 2002; Farley, 2003; Wong & VanPatten, 2003).

This line of research on how learners process input led to an instructional approach called “processing instruction” (VanPatten, 2004) based on a primary tenet that learners pay attention to meaning before they pay attention to grammatical form. For example, one principle is that “learners process input for meaning before they process it for form”; i.e., they attempt to understand the meaning of the message before they process grammatical structures (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 139). A second related principle is that “learners process content words in the input before anything else”; that is, they search for the words that offer the most clues to content, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives (Lee & VanPatten, p. 139). Processing instruction has also been called attention-oriented instruction (Doughty, 2003), based on the concept of the Noticing Hypothesis, which purposes that “SLA is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and notice in target language input and what they understand the significance of noticed input to be (Schmidt, 2001; as cited in Doughty, p. 288).

In processing instruction, learners process the form or structure by means of activities that contain structured input, “input that is manipulated in particular ways to push learners to become dependent on form and structure to get meaning” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 142). See Figure 1.3 for a series of three structured input activities. Key implications of input processing theory for foreign language instruction are:

1. learners need to be engaged in attending to meaningful input in order to make sense of grammatical forms and be able to use them in communication; and
2. mechanical grammar practice is not beneficial for language acquisition (Wong & VanPatten, 2003).

Variability in Performance. Krashen’s claim that only acquisition, and not learning, leads to spontaneous communication has been criticized by researchers because it fails to account for ways in which learners use both automatic and controlled processing in communicative situations. Krashen’s model also fails to account for the fact that what learners can do with language often varies within a single learner, over time, within contexts, and across different learners. In attempts to explain how and why performance varies, some researchers (Bialystok, 1981, 1982; Ellis, 1997; McLaughlin, Rossman, & McLeod, 1983; Tarone, 1983) posited that learners use automatic processes and controlled processes in a variety of combinations in their production and comprehension of the target language. When engaged in a conversation task, for example, the learner may activate automatic, unanalyzed processing as shown in this example.

Speaker 1: Hi.
Speaker 2: Hi, how are you?
Speaker 1: Fine, and you?
Speaker 2: Fine. (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 154)
The elements of language in this conversation become so automatized, i.e., used automatically, that we may answer “Fine” even before the question is asked. Controlled processing becomes automatic processing when learners practice regularly and what they practice becomes part of long-term memory. However, sometimes learners may be able to begin language processing with an automatized lexical item. For instance, beginning learners on the first day of language class can ask classmates their names in Spanish simply by using a lexical item of “¿Cómo te llamas?” which quickly becomes an automatized item. When the teacher instructs them that they must address a visiting adult guest in the classroom using the form “¿Cómo se llama?” they use controlled processing to consciously think about how to modify what they already know to use the correct phrase. In addition, Ellis (2005) asserts that only implicit or unconscious knowledge is at the basis of unplanned communicative performance. Segalowitz (2003) suggests that the more automatic the learner’s access to language stored in long-term memory, the more fluent the language use, since the learner is able to direct more attention to the meaning of the message and production. According to Ellis (1994), controlled and automatic processing accounts for (1) the individual variation in the learner’s language as different types of knowledge and processes are activated in different communicative contexts, and (2) variation in language use across language learners.

Lightbown (1985) also proposes some explanations to account for variations in learners’ production of language. For example, in certain situations, learners might use a given structure that is error-free and consistent with the target language, while in subsequent situations, such as after new material has been presented, they might use the same structure with errors. Errors may arise for a variety of reasons: the learner is tired, the communicative situation is too demanding, or the new learning leads to restructuring of existing linguistic knowledge. In the face of these circumstances, the learner “makes the very error that he or she had so recently appeared to have learned to overcome” (Segalowitz, 2003, p. 397). Then, learners use the form correctly again, having presumably restructured their understanding of the original structure plus the new material. This is called U-shaped behavior because of the way it is typically mapped, as illustrated in Figure 1.4. The source of U-shaped behavior is overgeneralization of language rules (see next section) and creation of rules for the language system. In this sense, when a student says, “*I eated,” this is a positive sign of progress toward working out the language system and differentiating, in this case, certain patterns for regular and irregular past tense verbs in English; it is not considered to be a misapplication of rules.

**Key points:** Learners use automatic processes and controlled processes in a variety of combinations in their production and comprehension of the target language.

The ability to verbalize a language rule does not signify that the language learner can use it in communication.

Research in the area of variability in performance shows teachers that an individual’s performance will vary over time and that performance varies from one individual learner to the next. In addition, the evidence convincingly indicates that the ability to verbalize a language rule does not signify that the language learner can use it in communication (Lightbown, 1985).

**Interlanguage Theory.** The language of the learner (Selinker, 1974) is interlanguage, that is, systematic and dynamic, “continually evolving as learners receive more input and revise their hypotheses about the second language” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 80). Current theories of L2 acquisition maintain that learners modify their interlanguage only when they integrate into their long-term memories the input that they hear or read; that is, they construct new hypotheses in order to incorporate the noticed features into the interlanguage system (Ellis, 1997; Gass, 1988).

Selinker’s Interlanguage Theory helps us to understand what happens in the mind of the learner. An implication for foreign language teachers is that a learner’s use of the target language reflects a system in development and therefore has errors that occur as a natural part of the acquisition process. As teachers provide good models of TL input and engage learners in attending to that input, learners alter their interlanguage to incorporate new and/or more accurate features of native speaker language.
Role of Modified Input, Interaction, and Output

**Long’s Interaction Hypothesis.** According to Long (1983), input comes to the individual from a variety of sources, including others. Individuals make their input “comprehensible” in three ways:

- by simplifying the input, i.e., using familiar structures and vocabulary;
- by using linguistic and extralinguistic features, i.e., familiar structures, background knowledge, gestures; and
- by modifying the interactional structure of the conversation.

This third element is the basis of Long’s (1981) Interaction Hypothesis, which accounts for ways in which input is modified and contributes to comprehension and acquisition. Long (1983, 1996) maintains that speakers make changes in their language as they interact or “negotiate meaning” with each other. *Negotiation of meaning* has been characterized as “exchanges between learners and their interlocuters as they attempt to resolve communication breakdown and to work toward mutual comprehension” (Pica, Holliday, Lewis, & Morgenthaler, 1989, p. 65). Speakers negotiate meaning to avoid conversational trouble or to revise language when trouble occurs. Through negotiation of meaning, interactions are changed and redirected, leading to greater comprehensibility. Further, these negotiations can lead to language development by the learner (Long, 1996). That is, by working toward comprehension, language input is made available for intake, cognitive inspection, and thus acquisition. The following exchange illustrates how a non-native speaker recognizes a new lexical item as a result of negotiating the meaning of the phrase *reading glasses*:

NS: there’s there’s a pair of reading glasses above the plant  
NNS: a what?  
NS: glasses reading glasses to see the newspaper?  
NNS: glassi?  
NS: you wear them to see with, if you can’t see. Reading glasses.  
NNS: ahh ahh glasses to read you say reading glasses  
NS: yeah  
(Mackey, 1999; as cited in Gass, 2003, p. 235)

What exactly does it mean to negotiate meaning? Just as in a business negotiation, two parties must participate by challenging, asking questions, and changing their positions. Merely conceding is not full negotiation. In the classroom this means that both parties in a teacher-student and student-student interaction must seek clarification, check comprehension, and request confirmation that they have understood or are being understood by the other. This process is often difficult to achieve in the classroom, given the traditional roles between teachers and students. Since students are often hesitant to question or counter-question the teacher, negotiation of meaning may not occur often. Although teachers often work to provide comprehensible input through a variety of techniques (visuals, simplified input, mime, etc.), this process does not necessarily inspire or lead to the negotiation of meaning. For this type of interaction to occur, both interlocutors must have equal rights in asking for clarification and adjusting what they say. Thus Long’s theory implies that learners cannot simply listen to input, but that they must be active conversational participants who interact and negotiate the type of input they receive in order to acquire language.

**Key point:** Learners must be active conversational participants who interact and negotiate with the type of input they receive in order to acquire language.
Swain’s Output Hypothesis. Swain (1985, 1995) argues that learners need comprehensible input but they also need opportunities to produce output. Simply stated, learners need to speak the language to achieve higher levels of language competence. According to Swain (1995), output, or speaking the language for the purpose of communicating one’s ideas, facilitates acquisition, as it (1) helps learners to discover that there is a gap between what they want to say and what they are able to say, (2) provides a way for learners to try out new rules and modify them accordingly, and (3) helps learners to actively reflect on what they know about the target language system. During speaking tasks, learners engage in what Swain refers to as pushed output, which allows them to move from what they want to say (e.g., the vocabulary they need) to how they say it (e.g., the grammar and syntax to make their meanings clear and appropriate to the context).

Additionally, by repeatedly using the target language in natural communicative situations and focusing on their output, learners eventually develop automaticity and move from analyzing what they want to say to being able to say it with ease. According to Ellis (1997), the use of linguistic knowledge becomes automatic only when learners make use of interlanguage knowledge under real conditions of communication. An example of this process occurs in a conversation in which a student who is narrating a story in the past states: “Realicé… no, no ‘realicé’… me di cuenta… ¿cuento? … cuenta, me di cuenta de que no tenía la… ¿aplicación? … no sé (laugh)...” (E. Glisan, advisory Oral Proficiency Interview, May 13, 2008) [Translation: I brought about, no not ‘I brought about’… I realized (puts wrong ending on the noun), I realized that I didn’t have the application?… I don’t know (laugh)....] In this example, the student uses two false cognates. First, he initially uses the verb realizar which resembles the English “to realize” but is not the correct verb for the context; he remembers the expression darse cuenta de que but questions whether this should be cuenta or cuenta and then decides on cuenta; second, he uses a false cognate aplicación and questions whether this is correct; he says no sé to signal that he’s unsure about the word he needs; he hypothesizes about a correct form based on what he already knows about cognates (aplicación); by laughing he shows that he is not sure of this invention and invites modification from his more capable listener; ultimately, the student succeeds in making the tale understandable to his listener. By talking through the difficulty, the student makes the story comprehensible, hypothesizes about the correct structure, attempts to apply what is already known, and reflects on the forms of language being used. Thus, as learners create output in the target language, focus on form naturally arises.

The implication of Swain’s theory is that teachers need to provide age-appropriate and interesting topics that students can explore in discussion and collaborative writing tasks that will produce output that leads students to reflect on the forms they are using, on the appropriateness of their language, and on ways to express what they want to say using what they have learned (R. Donato, personal communication, February 25, 2004). Output activities are also an effective way to improve the use of specific communication strategies, such as circumlocution (Scullen & Jourdain, 2000), and can be used “in order to clear up unresolved language problems that the collaborative dialogues...revealed” (Lapkin, Swain, & Smith, 2002, p. 498). Finally, teachers should recognize that the struggles they may observe in their students as they produce output are actually a sign that learning is taking place (R. Donato, personal communication, June 13, 2008).

You have now learned about the cognitive factors that are involved in language acquisition, as well as how input, interaction, and output play a role in acquisition as an individual achievement. What the individual learner does cognitively to acquire language is only part of the story. The argument continues between researchers who believe that language acquisition is an individual cognitive process that occurs in the mind of the learner and those who view acquisition as a social process (Firth & Wagner, 1997) through which learners acquire a TL by using it in social interaction (Lafford, 2007). However, of importance to foreign language teachers is that the SLA community is increasingly recognizing the pivotal role of language use in social interaction in facilitating language acquisition.
Language Learning as a Collaborative (Social) Achievement

Much of the research explored in the previous sections focuses on how L2 input is negotiated by individual learners by means of their own cognition and made more comprehensible. Although these studies acknowledge the importance of collaborative interaction in the learning process, their focus on negotiation of L2 input offers an incomplete picture of learners’ interaction in an L2 classroom setting (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998). The cognitivist and interactionist views have been challenged by researchers examining the nature of sociocultural theory. According to sociocultural theory, our linguistic, cognitive, and social development as members of a community is socioculturally constructed (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch & Bivens, 1992). As Wertsch states, our development “is inherently linked to the cultural, institutional and historical settings in which it occurs” (1994, p. 203). In this view, learning and development are as much social processes as cognitive processes, and occasions for instruction and learning are situated in the discursive interactions between experts and novices (Appel & Lantolf, 1994; Brooks, 1990; Lantolf, 1994; Rogoff, 1990; Wells, 1998).

Key point: Occasions for instruction and learning are situated in the discursive interactions between experts and novices.

Sociocultural Theory: Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development

Sociocultural theory, which appeared in the field in the 1990s, maintains that language learning is a social process rather than one that occurs within the individual and is based largely on the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986), whose views on learning and development in children differ markedly from those of Piaget, for whom a child’s cognitive development and maturity at least in part determine how he or she uses language. According to Piaget (1979), learning does not affect the course of development since maturation precedes learning; that is, the learner must be cognitively and developmentally ready to handle certain learning tasks. In Vygotsky’s (1978) view, however, learning precedes and contributes to development, and the learner’s language performance with others exceeds what the learner is able to do alone. To any learning tasks, the learner brings an actual developmental level, representing what the learner can do without assistance, and a potential developmental level, representing what the learner can do with the assistance of adults or more capable peers. Through interaction with others, the learner progresses from the “potential developmental level” to the “actual developmental level.” What learners can do with assistance today, they will be able to do on their own tomorrow or at some future point in time. Vygotsky defined the learner’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). It is important to understand that “the ZPD is not a physical place situated in time and space” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 17), but rather it is a metaphor for observing how social interaction and guided assistance are internalized by learners and contribute to language development. Further, it is not understood to be a transmission of information from an expert to a novice through social interaction. Instead, it is about people working together to “co-construct contexts in which expertise emerges as a feature of the group” (Lantolf, p. 17). Thus, the ZPD results in opportunities for individuals to develop their cognitive abilities by collaborating with others.
Figure 1.5 illustrates the continuous cycle of assistance in the Zone of Proximal Development, as it occurs in the task of co-constructing a puzzle with a novice. In Session 1, or the first attempt at building a puzzle, the novice recognizes the straight edges of the perimeter and is able to put those pieces of the puzzle together alone, without assistance from the expert. When engaging in this task, the novice is demonstrating his/her actual developmental level. With assistance from the expert, the novice puts together pieces of the puzzle that are within the puzzle but still close to the perimeter. In performing this set of tasks, the novice is working at his/her potential developmental level; he or she is able to perform the task, but only with expert assistance. Soon the novice will be able to perform this set of tasks without assistance, hence the term potential developmental level. Where the learner can achieve no performance with assistance, no ZPD is created.

Session 2 represents some future point in time (perhaps moments, weeks, or months later) when the novice can put more of the puzzle together on his/her own and needs assistance for only some of the puzzle. In other words, the potential developmental level of Session 1 becomes the actual developmental level of Session 2, illustrating the iterative nature of performance and assistance. In both sessions, the ZPD is depicted in the areas marked by assisted performance. Note that the ZPD gets smaller in Session 2, which is a sign of development and learning and indicates that the novice can now complete more tasks alone. In order to discover the ZPD of the novice, the expert or more capable peer enters into dialogic negotiation with the novice and offers help that is graduated, i.e., tailored to the level of the novice, and contingent, i.e., given only when needed and then withdrawn when the novice is able to function independently (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). The following dialogue might occur between an expert and a novice as they complete the task depicted in Figure 1.5, Session 1:

Expert: Let’s use the picture on the box to help us put the puzzle together. Why don’t we find the straight-edge pieces first?

Novice: OK. I can make the outside with the straight pieces by myself [unassisted performance].

Expert: Great, now we have the frame. Let’s try to find the pieces that have the same color. Can you find the blue and white pieces?

Novice: Here are some, but I don’t know how they go together.

Expert: That’s OK. We’ll do it together. Can we find pieces that have similar shapes?

Novice: Does this one go in this way?

Expert: Here...maybe if you turn it around, it’ll fit. There, you got it! [assisted performance] [Let’s try the other pieces that look the same].

Key point: What learners can do with assistance today, they will be able to do on their own tomorrow or at some future point in time.

Scaffolding in the ZPD. The language of the expert serves as directives to move the learner through his or her ZPD to the point where the learner is able to perform a task alone (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). The interaction between the expert and novice in a problem-solving task is called scaffolding (Duffy & Roehler, 1986; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). In scaffolding, the expert’s help is determined by what the novice is doing, and is structured so that irrelevant aspects of the task do not interfere with the learner’s range of ability. The expert provides the novice with scaffolded help by enlisting the learner’s interest in the task; simplifying the task; keeping the learner motivated and in pursuit of the goal; highlighting certain relevant features and pointing out discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution; reducing stress and frustration during problem solving; and modeling an idealized form of the act to be performed by completing the act or by explicating the learner’s partial solution (Wood et al., p. 98). The Vygotskyan concept of the ZPD suggests that language learning occurs when the learner receives appropriate types of assistance from the expert, e.g., teacher. In order to provide scaffolded assistance, it is important that the teacher know where students are in terms of their language development. Furthermore, the teacher’s role is (1) to recognize that assistance is contingent on what the novice is doing, not on what the expert thinks should be done, and (2) to know when to turn the task over to the novice for solo performance (R. Donato, personal communication, February 15, 2004; McCormick & Donato, 2000; VanLier, 1996). Appendix 1.1 lists the types of language-promoting assistance that reflect scaffolded help (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).
Transformation in the ZPD. The ZPD occurs in interactive activity where novices and experts work together to solve problems and, in the process, transform their individual knowledge of the task and understanding of each other (Newman & Holtzman, 1993). Working in the ZPD produces learning, which is reciprocal, and not just unidirectional from expert to novice. Wells (1999) points out that the results of this kind of ZPD activity enable learners to participate easily in similar communicative events and learn from them, such as when they speak with native speakers of the TL. In addition, by collaborating on a problem or task, the novice and expert transform their relationship and understanding of each other and of the task at hand.

The ZPD is not limited to instruction on language content, such as a grammatical structure. Kinginger (2002) suggests that it can be applied to all aspects of foreign language instruction and learning, including developing discourse competence and pragmatic and cultural appropriateness. For instance, in a setting where a teacher and a small group of students are helping each other to write and edit an e-mail letter to a school in Madrid, one student might suggest “You mentioned that you went to a football game, and that your team won by an extra point at the end of the game. Will the reader understand what an extra point is in American football?” The student who wrote the letter might say, “Do you think I need to explain a little about American football?” The assistance the first student provides could then lead the teacher to another suggestion, such as, “Your audience in Madrid may not be familiar with American football since they play soccer. Let me check with their teacher in Madrid and get back to you.” By working in the ZPD, this teacher and his/her learners provide mutual assistance and co-construct cultural knowledge that is available for present and future learning events. Perhaps in the future and because of this assistance, the concept of “audience” and the need to make cultural references clear will re-emerge for these students as an important aspect of the writing process. Moreover, as students make suggestions for what they want to say, they set their own learning agenda. Thus within the ZPD, teachers are informed of areas of interest to the learners and language and cultural knowledge they want to know.

Scaffolded interactions occur in the ZPD when the expert, e.g., the teacher or a more knowledgeable peer, reduces the frustration level of the task. In the case of the collective e-mail letter writing, the teacher provides suggestions and tools in the form of information about the audience to reduce student frustration in trying to provide necessary details in the letter. Scaffolding also suggests that the expert identifies critical features of the task (e.g., considering the audience when writing a letter and not assuming that football is played the same way everywhere in the world). During scaffolded interactions in the ZPD, the teacher is transformed from one who provides solutions to one who facilitates the learners’ search for solutions. The teacher also gains from the interaction by observing how his/her assistance is used by the students, how his/her help leads them to a potential level of development, and where his/her students might be in their letter writing ability in the future. Empirical evidence also supports the function of the ZPD as an activity through which social patterns of interaction and mutual assistance can result in learning (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). It is important to note that the ZPD is an activity that is at the same time the tool for learning language and the result of using language with others. It is not just a tool for a result, but rather tool and result; e.g., a teacher uses the tool of a story and engages students in short retelling or writing, which results in the creation of the ZPD where he or she may provide scaffolding. Language use creates a ZPD so that learning can happen; this learning may be decided upon by the learners (i.e., not just by curricular objectives) and involve what they need to know in order to accomplish the activities in which they are engaged. The ZPD, therefore, is a powerful concept that offers a different view from that of the typical “delivery of instruction” model of language teaching.
**i + 1 is not ZPD.** The concepts of i + 1 and the ZPD are intuitively appealing to teachers and are often viewed as the same concept. They are indeed very different concepts and offer differing explanations for language learning. The i + 1 is primarily a cognitive view that holds that language learning makes use of innate knowledge within the mind of a learner, who functions primarily as an individual in processing comprehensible input (Atkinson, 2002; Dunn & Lantolf, 1998; Pennycook, 1997). By contrast, the ZPD posits that language learning is an activity that happens through interaction and collaboration in social settings while the learner responds to those around him/her. It is an “outside-in” (Shore, 1996) process in which learners use the language with the support of others while simultaneously learning it. The i + 1 is about language and input. The ZPD is about working together, participating in a community and obtaining the assistance needed to enable continued participation in that community. Thus, the ZPD is not just a tool for using and learning about language but also arises as a result of using language in meaningful and purposeful ways with others (McCafferty, 2002; Newman & Holtzman, 1993). When teachers and learners work in the ZPD, language learning cannot be separated from language use (Kinginger, 2001).

**Mediation in the ZPD.** Within a sociocultural perspective, learners use tools as a means of mediating between themselves and the world, as a way of assisting and supporting their learning and making sense of the world around them, including the language classroom. Mediational tools can take the form of the textbook, visuals, classroom discourse patterns, opportunities for interaction in the second language, direct instruction, or teacher assistance (Donato & McCormick, 1994). One type of mediational tool is the portfolio, which students can construct to reflect on language, to clarify and set goals, to select effective strategies to enhance performance, and to provide concrete evidence of strategy use (Donato & McCormick). Mediational tools assist learning, are both social and cultural, and may be determined by a variety of factors, such as distribution of educational resources. For example, in one school setting, every student might have a wireless computer, while in another setting computers may be largely inaccessible to students. Or, some students may prefer to use specific tools such as vocabulary lists and verb conjugations. In other classes, students may be more willing to use tools such as authentic documents to mediate their learning. The attitudes toward using mediational tools are often the result of social and school learning practices, since students are socialized into certain forms of mediation as a way to learn, into how to use tools to learn, and even into believing that certain types of tools contribute to learning in a valuable way.

Language itself is also an important mediational tool. Classroom discourse and classroom conversational episodes can mediate language development by facilitating a range of communicative and cognitive functions of talk (Donato, 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Further, collaboration allows students to use language to mediate their language learning because in collaboration students use language to reflect on the language they are learning. For example, learners may try out alternate ways of saying a phrase or (Un piscine? Une piscine? Or Il est allé a l’école? Il a allé a l’école?). Here language itself is a tool for reflecting on the language being learned. Donato’s (1994) study revealed the use of this type of verbal mediation by learners of L2 French, who negotiated linguistic forms with one another in small-group work. Although no individual possessed complete knowledge of the forms produced, through their mutual assistance and collective problem-solving, the group was correctly constructed utterances for their later presentation to the class. Thus learners can successfully acquire language through their verbalizations, which act as a way of scaffolding for each other.
Sociocultural theory also maintains that learning is facilitated by the learner’s use of self-talk, which serves as a mediational tool (Ellis, 1997). According to Vygotsky (1986), one of the mediational tools used by children is speech for the self, or private speech, a type of thinking aloud that helps to structure and clarify a task to be done or a problem to be solved. For example, Vygotsky cites the following example of private speech used by a child during play activity to overcome a cognitive difficulty: (Child speaking to himself/herself) “Where’s the pencil? I need a blue pencil. Never mind, I’ll draw with the red one and wet it with water; it will become dark and look like blue?” (Vygotsky, p. 29). Private speech is the convergence of thought and language, which acts as “an instrument of thought in the proper sense...as it aids the individual in seeking and planning the solution of a problem” (Vygotsky, p. 31). Adults use private speech, sometimes in the form of whispering to the self in second language learning, as they attempt to make sense of a task or reveal that they suddenly understand or have mastered a source of difficulty with some aspect of the task (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks, Donato, & McGlone, 1997; Frawley & Lantolf, 1985; McCafferty, 1994). Smith (1996) found that learners use private speech to make sense of grammatical structures and explanations and that this private speech is often marked by repetitions, hesitations, and incomprehensible utterances. Of importance here is that teachers can most effectively deal with students’ private speech by playing the role of a patient and understanding listener, not by reacting like a “lifeguard ready to dive in as soon as the student goes under,” or as soon as private speech emerges (Smith, as cited in Donato, 2000, p. 31).

Lantolf (1997) proposes that one of the functions of private speech is language play, the mediational tool by which learners experiment with those grammatical, phonological, and lexical features of the language being acquired. Children, for example, compare their old and new knowledge of the language by modifying language structures through strategies such as completions and substitutions, by imitating and transforming what others say, and by repeating their own utterances (Kuczaj, 1983). Language play involves producing L2 forms to be used later in public, talking out loud to oneself, and repeating L2 sounds (Lantolf). Children imitate parts of new utterances that are either within or slightly beyond their current level of linguistic competence. During this imitation, children also play with the language, changing it slightly or experimenting with its words. For Vygotsky, language play creates a zone of proximal development in which the child “always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102).

Some studies suggest that adolescent and adult language learners mediate learning through mental rehearsal, a form of language play, through activities such as mental correction of errors, silent repetition, mental practice of grammatical rules, and taking notes (de Guerrero, 1994; Reiss, 1985). Although there has been little research in the area of language play by adult learners, some evidence suggests that those who engage in these activities are more successful language learners (Ramsey, 1980) and that the value of language play in the acquisition process may decrease as the learner’s proficiency in the language increases (Lantolf, 1997; Parr & Krashen, 1986). An interesting finding in Lantolf’s 1997 study of the use of language play by university students studying Spanish is that learners tended to engage in language play most frequently after more meaningful activities, such as conversations, and less so after mechanical tasks, such as grammar study and pattern drills. For foreign language instruction, language play may be activated through meaningful activities and may facilitate the language learning process. In this perspective, language play is rehearsal of private speech and thus, it is part of the cognitive work of language learning.

This view of language play as rehearsal contrasts with the view of language play as fun or self-amusement known as ludic play (Broner & Tarone, 2001; Cook, 2000). Fun, defined as “an experience of positive affect often associated with laughter” (Broner & Tarone, p. 364) can be play with language form, including sounds, rhyme, rhythm, song, etc.; or it can also be play with meaning, combining semantic elements to create words that do not exist. In this sense, ludic play is not transactional or interactive since its primary function is to amuse oneself and have fun (Cook). Tarone (2000) points out that children often play with language they know or are learning for enjoyment and self-entertainment. When students invent words, create songs, or write graffiti on their notebooks in the language, they are engaging in ludic play, and are mediating learning as a result of reflecting upon language, exploring the language, and learning it. This process is very common in L1 language development. Thus, ludic language play may contribute to the growth and development of the learner’s interlanguage (Broner & Tarone, 2001).

Key point: Private speech, mental rehearsal, and language play foster flexibility and change within the interlanguage system of the learner, resulting in its growth and development.
It is important to remember that sociocultural (i.e., Vygotskyan) theory differs from the Interaction Hypothesis because of the different emphasis placed on internal cognitive processes. Whereas the Interaction Hypothesis offers learners the input they need to activate internal processes, sociocultural theory maintains that “Speaking and writing mediate thinking, which means that people can gain control over their mental processes as a consequence of internalizing what others say to them and what they say to others” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 47). Interactional and cognitive models have also placed a great deal of emphasis on the elevated role of the native speaker and have portrayed non-native speakers to be their subordinates (Firth & Wagner, 1997, 2007). Sociocultural research, however, has rejected the notion that language learners are deficient communicators striving to reach the level of an idealized native speaker, but rather as learners who succeed at communication by using every competency and strategy they have at their disposal (Firth & Wagner, 1997, 2007). A new attitude toward learners and what they do (rather than what they don’t do) derives from the perspective of the learner as creatively managing language resources rather than struggling to find a strategy to compensate for a gap in knowledge.

### Interactional Competence

The social nature of language learning and development and the role of learners’ interaction in the classroom setting requires the ability to manage discussions in relevant ways. Hall (1995) suggested that input must also occur within meaningful contexts and be situated within real communication in “recurring episodes of purposeful, goal-directed talk,” in the establishment and maintenance of a community (p. 38). Providing interactive classroom environments that help facilitate the development of learners’ interactional competence in the TL involves more than the use of simplified syntax, repetition, and clarification requests (Hall, p. 56). Examples of interactive practices within the classroom community are how teachers lead discussions about texts, how they introduce or practice vocabulary, and how they promote pair/group work. Competent participation in these practices requires the development of interactional competence as learners and teachers participate in “real” conversations. Characteristics of “real” conversational models, as adapted from Hall are:

- Opening utterances establish the topic and frame the rhetorical structure: “So, how was your vacation?”
- Ellipsis—that is, not repeating information that is already known—makes clear the distinction between new and old information. As the conversational exchange continues, already established information is generally not repeated. For example, in response to a question such as “When do you leave for class today?” one might give the short answer “Ten o’clock,” rather than the complete sentence “I leave for class today at ten o’clock.”
- Related lexical items occur in topic-specific discourse and are linked because of their common referent. The meaning of new words is figured out by using the surrounding topically oriented words to help narrow the possible meaning choices (Clark, 1992; Halliday, 1994). For example, in a discussion about hunting, related lexical items might include these expressions: to go hunting, to shoot, gun, trap, deer, bears, turkeys, tracks, animal protectionists.
- Expressive reactions are made: “Oh my! I don’t believe it!”; questions that advance the topic are asked: “What do you mean by that?”; explanations or extensions, or a transition to a new topic are made: “By the way, I wanted to ask you...”

Hall (1995, 2004) has used conversation analysis (CA) as a technique for analyzing and understanding classroom interactional patterns as revealed in episodes of actual classroom discourse. In her 1995 study, Hall examined the nature of topic development and management of communication in classroom interactive practices that claimed to focus on speaking in a high school first-year Spanish classroom. Her analyses of recordings from the classroom found that the typical conversational exchanges that the teacher considered to be communicative showed little evidence of a real conversational topic, opening utterances, related lexical items, ellipses, or reactions. A major implication of Hall’s study is that learners need truly interactive environments in the classroom if they are to develop the ability to interact effectively outside the classroom with other speakers of the target language.
The Role of Affect and Motivation

Other variables may influence the degree of success in learning another language and are those pertaining to affect, such as motivation, anxiety, personality, and attitude. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, as first proposed by Dulay and Burt (1977), relates these affective factors to the second language acquisition process. Also, as seen earlier, Krashen (1982) maintains that acquisition can occur only in the presence of certain affective conditions: the learner is motivated, self-confident, and has a low level of anxiety.

According to Dörnyei and Skehan, “motivation concerns the direction and magnitude of human behavior, or more specifically (i) the choice of a particular action, (ii) the persistence with it, and (iii) the effort expended on it” (2003, p. 614). Motivation has been identified as the most influential factor in successfully learning a new language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). However, it is also one of the most complex issues in SLA research.

Motivation of Individual Learners

There are many sources that motivate an individual to succeed in language learning, and it is difficult to match specific motivational factors to success. Gardner (1985) identifies two kinds of motivation that are interrelated or that may lead to the other: (1) instrumental, e.g., learning a language to get a better job or to fulfill an academic requirement; and (2) integrative, e.g., learning a language to fit in with people who speak the language natively. In his summary of motivational research, MacIntyre asserts that “The major motivation to learn another language is to develop a communicative relationship with people from another cultural group” (2007, p. 566). Higher integratively motivated students worked harder with a positive additide (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2000), received receive higher oral proficiency ratings and expressed a greater desire to continue their study (Hernández, 2006). The author suggests that language teachers can enhance the integrative motivation of their students by providing opportunities for interaction with authentic materials (including multimedia) and with members of the TL community (Hernández).

Other motivational factors include such sociocultural elements as relevance of course goals to the learner, personal beliefs about success or failure, the ability of the learner to provide self-reward and self-evaluation, the nature of the teacher’s feedback and assistance to the learner, instructional features of the course, travel, friendship, knowledge, identification, sociocultural, media, whether or not the language was a requirement, ethnic heritage related, gender related and school related (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Ely, 1986; Reiss, 1985; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Sung & Padilla, 1998; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995; Yang, 2003). Furthermore, Dörnyei (1994) maintains that language learners are often motivated by the classroom experience itself: (1) course-specific factors, such as the degree to which the teaching method, materials, and learning tasks are interesting and engaging; (2) teacher-specific factors, such as the teacher’s personality, teaching style, and relationship to students; and (3) group-specific factors, such as the dynamics of the learning group (p. 277). Motivation encourages greater effort from language learners and usually leads to greater success in terms of language proficiency (Gardner, 1985), maintenance of language skills over time (Tucker, Hamayan, & Genesee, 1976), and identification with members of the target language community (Goldberg & Noels, 2006). Interestingly, among learners whose goal for language study was to fulfill a requirement, Reiss (1985) and Gillette (1990) found an absence of language play.

Dörnyei (2001) proposed a “process model of learning motivation in the L2 classroom,” which depicts motivation as a dynamic process that changes over time and consists of three phases. In the pre-actional phase, “choice motivation” refers to setting goals and launching one’s study of L2, and is influenced by factors such as attitudes towards the L2 and expectancy of success. The actional phase features “executive motivation” and deals with carrying out the tasks required to maintain motivation; this phase is affected by factors such as the quality of the learning experience, one’s sense of autonomy, and the classroom reward-and-goal-structure. In the post-actional stage, “motivational retrospection” enables the learner to reflect on his or her learning experience, assess the outcomes, and determine future goals; this phase is influenced by self-concept beliefs and feedback and praise received (Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003, p. 619). In another model called “expectancy-value theory,” researchers have linked motivation to one’s expectancy to succeed and the value that the individual associates with success in a given task (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Mori & Gobel, 2006). Following this line of research, Mori and Gobel found that female students of EFL were more integratively motivated than their male peers using both the value-expectancy theory and models suggested by Gardner and his associates.
Personality or cognitive styles also affect language learning; these factors include the willingness to take risks, openness to social interactions, and attitude toward the target language and target language users (Wong-Fillmore, 1985; Young, 1990). Motivation and attitudes are often related to anxiety, apprehension, or fear about the language learning experience. In some cases, language activities such as speaking in front of a group can create performance anxiety, especially in the case of learners who do not enjoy interacting with others spontaneously or learners whose oral-aural skills are weaker than their visual skills (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Anxiety often stems from the traditional social structure of the classroom, in which the powerful teacher-centered atmosphere may inhibit interaction, or from the feeling that the learning experience is irrelevant or a waste of time (Scarcella & Oxford). Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that anxious learners attempted to avoid errors and were disturbed at having made them. Gregersen (2003) found that anxious learners made more errors, self-repaired and resorted to their native language more often, recognized fewer errors in a stimulated recall situation, and overestimated the number of errors they made (p. 29). Nonanxious learners, on the other hand, used their errors to learn and to communicate better.

Motivation of Learners Within Tasks

Wen’s 1997 study illustrated that expectations of the learning task and of one’s own ability play a significant role in motivation and learning: When learners think that learning experiences will lead to certain meaningful results, they exert more effort. Motivation has an effect on how and when students use language learning strategies and the degree to which they take responsibility for their own progress (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) also used a task-based framework to study motivation. They examined how learners addressed certain tasks and related their findings to the students’ attitudes toward the L2 class, toward specific tasks, and toward achievement in the course. Findings showed that motivational factors have a significant impact on the learner’s engagement in a task. Students with high positive attitude toward a task were more engaged in the task and produced more language. Also, students with a low attitude toward a task still performed well if they had a positive attitude toward the course in general.

For the beginning teacher, it is important to recognize that motivational factors play an important but complex role in language learning and performance in a language classroom. Figure 1.6 illustrates ten suggestions for how teachers can motivate language learners by creating a supportive and engaging environment that is goal-oriented and personalized to the interests of learners.

Key point: Motivational factors play an important but complex role in language learning and performance in a language classroom.

Implications of the Research for Classroom Teaching

Throughout this chapter, you have explored key research findings and their important implications for classroom language instruction. Teacher’s Handbook supports a sociocultural view of language instruction, whereby learners have ample opportunities to interact meaningfully with others. Within this type of instructional framework, there is NO room for mechanical practice that is devoid of meaning. Accordingly, throughout the rest of this text, you will learn more about the importance of providing the following elements in the foreign language classroom:

- comprehensible input in the target language that is directed toward a larger communicative goal or topic;
- an interactive environment that models and presents a variety of social, linguistic, and cognitive tools for structuring and interpreting participation in talk;
- opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning in the target language, with assistance from the teacher and one another;
- opportunities for learners to interact communicatively with one another in the target language;
- conversations and tasks that are purposeful and meaningful to the learner and that parallel real-life situations in which they might expect to use their language skills (Met, 2004, p. 86);
- explicit instruction in strategies that facilitate language awareness, learner autonomy, and making meaning when interpreting the foreign language (Met; Pica, 2002);
• a nonthreatening environment that encourages self-expression;
• opportunities for learners to work within their ZPDs in order to develop their language and transform their knowledge;
• opportunities for language learners to participate in setting the agenda for what they learn.

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

The following two activities will enable you to examine elements of language learning that occur in classrooms and in other settings.

EPISODE ONE
Observing a Child Interacting in His/Her Native Language (L1)

ACTFL/NCATE 3.a. Understanding Language Acquisition and Creating a Supportive Classroom
TESOL/NCATE 1.a. Describing Language and 1.b. Language Acquisition and Development

Observe a small child between the ages of two and a half and three years old who is interacting with one or more persons (parent, older siblings, etc.) in his/her native language. Observe for at least one hour, paying particular attention to the child’s use of language. Use the Observation Guide to analyze the conversation.

Alternative Observation of a Child Interacting in His/Her Native Language (L1)

If you cannot observe a small child using his/her native language, use the following transcription of a 3-year old boy named Alex talking to his mother in their native language after he returns home from preschool. Use the Observation Guide to help analyze the script as you read it.

Mother: Hi Alex! How was your day at preschool?
Alex: Good.
Mother: What did you do at preschool today?
Alex: Eated a snack.
Mother: You ate a snack? Great! What did you eat?
Alex: Cupcakes with M&Ms. It was Steven’s birthday. We singed “Happy Birthday.”
Mother: Really?
Alex: YEP.
Mother: Did you do anything else for Steven’s birthday?
Alex: Oh, we broke a...a...pin...uh...you know...with a big stick.
Mother: What did you break?
Alex: A big thing. It had candy in it and went all over the floor. Can’t remember what you call it...A pin...
Mother: Oh, you mean a piñata.
Alex: Yeah, a piñata. It looked like a big fish with feathers.
Mother: I’ll bet that was fun, Alex.
Alex: Yep. I got a lot of candy!

Source: ACTFL / Weber State University, 2003, Foreign Language Methods Online course
EPISODE TWO
Observing a Beginning Language (L2) Class

ACTFL/NCATE 3.a. Understanding Language Acquisition and Creating a Supportive Classroom
TESOL/NCATE 1.a. Describing Language and 1.b. Language Acquisition and Development

Now observe a beginning language learning classroom in an elementary, secondary school, or college/university setting. Refer to the questions presented in the Observation Guide below as you observe the students interacting in the foreign language. Then answer the questions in the guide.

OBSERVATION GUIDE
The Language of Interaction

novice = child or classroom learner
expert = caretaker, older individual, teacher

1. Why are the expert and novice speaking? What is the topic of conversation?
2. When does the novice participate in the conversation? To answer questions? To ask questions? To provide additional information? How would you characterize the nature of the novice’s talk?
3. When does the expert speak? To offer information? To ask questions? What kinds of questions does the expert ask? How would you characterize the nature of the expert’s talk?
4. How does the expert react to what the novice says?
5. How does the expert help the novice when the novice has trouble expressing an idea? Do you see examples of explicit talk about the language?
6. What happens when the expert and novice do not understand each other?
7. What kind of language errors do you notice?
8. What does the expert do when the novice makes a language mistake?
9. What types of assistance does the expert offer to the novice?
10. What are some examples of language play or mental rehearsal used by the novice?

As you reflect upon the classroom you visited in Episode Two (or upon any other observation you made), describe the role of input, output, meaningful social interaction, and collaboration in light of the theoretical frameworks presented in this chapter. Describe the similarities and differences between the observations you did in Episodes 1 and 2.

Also see the Teacher’s Handbook Web site for a link to a video of a kindergarten immersion French class for examples of emerging language use.

DISCUSS AND REFLECT

Case Study Two: Using Songs to Engage Learners
Case Study Three: Conducting a Cooperative Learning Task

CASE STUDY ONE
Creating Real Conversational Models

ACTFL/NCATE 3.a. Understanding Language Acquisition and Creating a Supportive Classroom; 3.b. Developing Instructional Practices That Reflect Language Outcomes and Learner Diversity; 4.b. Integrating Standards in Instruction

TESOL/NCATE 1.b. Language Acquisition and Development and 2.a. Cultural Groups and Identity

Mr. Noonen has been teaching Spanish and French for over fifteen years in an urban middle school. He is very active in local, regional, and state organizations devoted to the teaching of foreign languages. His peers, both native and nonnative speakers of Spanish, consider him to be very proficient in his knowledge of and ability to use Spanish. He is committed to providing a Spanish language environment in which his students have many opportunities to develop their ability to use the language. He uses Spanish almost exclusively in his teaching.
Dr. Lindford, professor of the foreign language teaching methods class at a local university, decided to send three Spanish Education majors to observe Mr. Noonen’s class so that they could observe interactive practice labeled by the teacher as “practicing speaking” and identified by him as being significant to his goal of preparing his students for participation in “natural conversation” in Spanish (Hall, 1995, p. 43). Students were instructed to script several brief episodes of conversation between Mr. Noonen and his students. They would then analyze these scripted episodes for characteristics of real conversational models.

The next week students returned to the methods class with the scripts, one of which appears below (Hall). Students reported that the teacher began the lesson by playing a tape of songs by Gloria Estefan, and after about 30 seconds, he began the questioning that appears in the script below. [Note: The ↓ arrow indicates a falling intonation and the ↑ arrow indicates a rising intonation. Ellipses (...) indicate pauses or interruptions in the discussion. Colons (:::) indicate an elongated vowel. The teacher asks questions and various students in the class respond.]

1. Teacher: Es música ↓ no ↑ música ↓ no ↑
2. Julio: no
3. T: es música ↓ es música ↓ es música ↓
4. T: ahora señor te gusta ↑ te gusta la música ↑
5. Julio: no me gusta ↓
6. T: no me gusta ↓
7. Julio: no me gusta ↓
8. T: no me gusta la música ↓ te gusta la música ↑
9. T: no me gusta la música ↓ te gusta la música ↑
10. Several Ss: I do sí sí yeah sí
11. Rafael: aw man where you goin ↓
12. T: sí me gusta la música ↓ te gusta la música ↑
13. Andrea: sí ↓
[...]
31. T: [loudly] es música de Gloria Estefan ↓
32. Several Ss: [unintelligible talk]
33. [T writes on board]
34. Rafael: If you’d speak English I’d understand
35. T: sí Gloria Estefan...Pon Poncherelo te gusta Gloria Estefan ↑
36. Ponch: sí ↓
37. T: sí ↓
38. Julio: who’s Gloria Estefan ↑
39. Ponch: me sí gusta
40. T: sí ↓ me gusta me gusta Gloria Estefan...sí ↓ me gusta Gloria Estefan
41. Rafael: Oh, that’s the person who was singing that song...that’s the person who was singing that song
[...]
61. Santiago: hey can we listen to some Spanish rap called the Spanish [unintelligible]
62. T: perdón ↑
63. Santiago: (repeats the name [unintelligible])
64. T: te gusta ↑
65. Santiago: yeah [unintelligible talk]
66. T: ah bueno fantástico tienes la cinta ↑
67 Santiago: yeah
68 T: sí ↑ la cinta es es la (goes to get cassette tape) aquí (holds up tape)
69 T: la cinta clase la cinta
70 Ss: la cinta
71 T: sí:::sí la cinta tienes la cinta de::: [unintelligible]
72 T: tú tienes la cinta ↑ la cinta ↑
73 Male S: where’d you get it
74 Rafael: where’d you get it
75 Laura: do you have it on tape
76 Julio: do you have it on tape
77 Rafael: do you have it on tape
78 Santiago: I don’t have it on tape I saw it in a store
79 Santiago: I saw it in a store
80 T: o::::h cómpramel ↓ eh ↑
81 T: ok bueno fantástico ↓

Ask yourself these questions:
1. What purpose or objective do you think the teacher has in mind for conducting this conversational exchange? Is his objective achieved?
2. How can you tell that there is no larger topical issue or goal to which the conversation is directed?
3. Explain why this exchange does not reflect a “real conversation” as described by Hall in this chapter.
4. What do the responses of the students indicate about the degree to which they understand the conversation and/or are motivated to engage in discussion?
5. What does the teacher attempt to do with his talk about “la cinta” in lines 68-72? How would you characterize what happens in lines 73-79?

To prepare for class discussion:
1. Analyze the script presented above for characteristics of a real conversational model using the criteria suggested by Hall (1995): opening utterance, ellipsis, use of related lexical items, and reactions.
2. Now analyze the script to find uses of L1 and L2. Who uses each language and for what purpose(s)?
3. What larger conversational topic might the teacher develop on the basis of the authentic Gloria Estefan music? Look at the full description of the TESOL/NCATE standards suggested for this Case Study. For an ESL or an EFL class, how might such a discussion of authentic music from any of the cultures represented in the class fit into a content area lesson?
4. What types of language-promoting assistance, as presented in Appendix 1.1, might the teacher have used to encourage students to speak and engage in conversation?
5. Teachers often require students to respond to questions in complete sentences so that they can practice various grammatical points and new vocabulary. As we saw in the script above, this teacher goal caused problems in the conversational exchange. Students need to be able to talk in sentence form, yet a question-answer format does not always lend itself to responses in complete sentences without making the conversation seem unnatural. What type of activity might you design that would more naturally elicit a discussion of likes and dislikes in the language you teach? Try to elicit sentence-length utterances.

TECHNO FOCUS.
In this Case Study, you have seen how a teacher attempts to use a song as the basis for discussion. Now you will see how a college professor engaged her learners with authentic materials from the Dominican Republic using music, lyrics, photos, and language practice exercises. She instructed students to do the following: “Go to the main page at http://www.colby.edu/~bknelson/SLC/ojala/index.html. Click on la canción to listen to the song entitled Ojalá que llueva café by Juan Luis Guerra. Click on the underlined vocabulary words to see images and explanations of new words. Follow the links on the word Ojalá to see how Arabic culture influenced the Spanish-speaking world. Click on galería de fotos to see images of the homeland of the singer. Click on ejercicios to analyze the song and send your analysis to the professor. Click on repaso de vocabulario en Ojalá to check your understanding of the new words. Click on several of the grammatical exercises to explore formation and use of the subjunctive. Click on Global Forum on the World’s Future to write a short essay on your fears and hopes for the future of the world using noun clauses and the present subjunctive. Click on traducción to see a translation of the lyrics for the song.”

Reflect on the activities that learners were asked to do by answering the following questions:

1. How do you think learners might work in their ZPDs using this song as presented in this webpage?
2. How might learners be engaged in meaningful interaction with one another as they explore this song and complete the various activities?
3. What role do you think authentic materials like these will play in learner motivation?
4. The Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) awarded to this page its “Editor’s choice” medallion in 2002 and named it a “Merlot classic.” Go to MERLOT’s main page at http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm, click on ‘world languages’ and explore other items in the collection.