Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language

FOURTH EDITION

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3 Principles of Instructed Second Language Learning

ROD ELLIS

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do you think about teaching? Do you think about it in terms of what and how you will teach? Or do you think about it in terms of how you can create the conditions for successful second language learning?
- If you were asked to state general principles that could help teachers create the conditions for successful learning in the classroom, what would they be?
- How can you tell that students are successfully learning in the second language in your classroom?

EXPERIENCE

All teachers have a theory of how teaching can assist learning. However, the theory that teachers hold may be more or less explicit. That is, teachers may base their teaching on intuitive notions of what works rather than on explicit principles of how they can best promote learning in their students. Intuitive notions can result in highly successful teaching—and are probably necessary to enable a teacher to take the countless instant decisions needed to accomplish a lesson—but they may not promote critical reflection. If teachers are to undertake a thoughtful evaluation of their own teaching, they need to make the principles that inform their actions explicit. A major goal of this chapter is to offer a set of principles that can inform such an evaluation. Let us look at how one teacher undertook a principled evaluation of her own teaching.

Juanita Watts (2009) elected to plan, teach, and undertake an evaluation of an information-gap task (i.e., spot the difference). This required the students (upper-intermediate learners in a private language school in Auckland, New Zealand) to work together in pairs to identify the changes evident in two pictures of the same location 100 years apart. Each student held only one of the pictures. The main goal of Juanita's evaluation was to determine to what extent the task resulted in the kinds of interaction that have been hypothesized to promote language learning—in particular the negotiation of meaning that occurs when a communication problem arises. To help with this evaluation, she recorded two pairs of students performing the task and then transcribed their interactions.

Juanita identified a number of negotiation-and-meaning sequences in both pairs' interactions. Interestingly, all the sequences arose from problems having to do with vocabulary or pronunciation. There was no negotiation focused on grammatical problems. She also reported some differences in how the two pairs undertook the task. One pair engaged much more extensively in negotiation than the other and also worked harder to resolve the communication problems that arose and was more successful in doing so. There was also a difference in how the two pairs negotiated. The pair that negotiated extensively did so by means of clarification requests, whereas the other pair employed confirmation checks. The two examples that follow illustrate these differences. In Example 1, the two students persist until they successfully resolve their communication problem with Student 2 (S2) repeatedly requesting clarification. In Example 2, Student 4 (S4) uses a confirmation check to address a vocabulary problem, but even though Student 3 (S3) indicates that Student 4

(S4) has not understood, no further attempt is made to resolve the problem.

Example 1

S1: on the left, I can see um lam – post. Lam-post.
S2: wh-pardon? What? (= clarification request)
S1: lam – sorry. Lam post.
S2: name post? (= clarification request)
S1: /leim/ post /laem/ post post post
S2: L – A? (= clarification request)
S1: L-A-M lam
S2: Ah, lamp. Ah lamp post (successfully resolved)

Example 2

S3: And . . . can you see the, can you say, electronic lines
S4: road? (= confirmation check)
S3: no, no
S4: no (not resolved)

Juanita concluded that the task was successful in generating interaction that created opportunities for learning. She noted, however, that the task resulted in very different behavior in the two students. She suggested this was because S1 and S2 had different first languages (L1s) whereas S3 and S4 shared the same L1. She also suggested that they differed in terms of the extent to which they worked together collaboratively. S1 and S2 displayed a high level of mutuality, but S3 assumed a dominant role and S4 a more passive role, reflecting differences in their English proficiency.

Juanita's evaluation drew on a number of the principles of instructed language learning discussed later in this chapter. Principle 8 states: *The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency.* This principle motivated her to investigate one specific aspect of interaction—the negotiation of meaning. Principle 9 states: *Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners.* Juanita found that the two pairs of learners reacted very differently to the task and sought explanations for why this was. Principle 4 states: *Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge.* Juanita elected to use an information-gap task because this caters to the kind of incidental acquisition that fosters implicit knowledge. However, in the conclusion to her evaluation, she states that her lesson would have benefited from some explicit attention to language and suggests that this could have been provided in the form of a post-task activity that focused directly on the errors the students were making.

Evaluation is a key element of good teaching. For evaluation to be effective, it needs to draw on a set of explicitly formulated principles of instructed language learning. It also needs to subject these principles to critical scrutiny in the light of a teacher's reflection on her teaching. Juanita's task evaluation is a good example of how this can be undertaken.

WHAT IS INSTRUCTED SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING?

Second language acquisition (SLA), as a subdiscipline of applied linguistics, is still a very young field of study. While it may not be possible to identify its precise starting point, many researchers agree that the late 1960s marked the onset of an intense period of empirical and theoretical interest in how second languages are acquired. While some researchers have been concerned with purely theoretical issues of little direct relevance to language pedagogy, others have addressed how instruction can assist SLA. There are now numerous studies that have investigated the effects of instruction on learning. Norris and Ortega (2000), for example, identified a total of 79 such studies and there have been many more since. Also, much of the theorizing about SLA has been specifically undertaken with language pedagogy in mind: for example, Krashen's Monitor Model (Krashen, 1981), Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), DeKeyser's Skill-Acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 1998), VanPatten's Processing Instruction theory (VanPatten, 1996, 2002), and my own theory of instructed language learning (R. Ellis, 1994a) all address the role of instruction in SLA.

However, the research and theory do not afford a uniform account of how instruction can best facilitate language learning. There is considerable controversy (see R. Ellis, 2006). In particular, there is no agreement as to whether instruction should be based on a traditional *focus-on-forms* approach, involving the systematic teaching of grammatical features in accordance with a structural syllabus, or a *focus-on-form* approach, involving attention to linguistic features in the context of communicative activities derived from a task-based syllabus, or some combination of the

two. Nor is there agreement about the efficacy of teaching explicit knowledge or about what type of corrective feedback to provide or even when explicit grammar teaching should commence. These controversies reflect the complexity of the object of enquiry (instructed language acquisition), its contextual nature, and the fact that what constitutes the most effective approach for one learner may not do so for another.

Given these controversies, it might be thought unwise to attempt to formulate a set of general principles of instructed language acquisition. Hatch's (1979) warning—"apply with caution"—is as pertinent today as it was over 30 years ago.

Nevertheless, I think there is a need to try to draw together a set of generalizations that might serve as the basis for language teacher education. I am not alone in this; Lightbown (1985, 2000) felt and responded to a similar need. If SLA is to offer teachers guidance, there is a need to bite the bullet and proffer advice, as long as this advice does not masquerade as prescriptions or proscriptions (and there is always a danger that advice will be so construed). The guidance provided by this chapter should be viewed as tentative, in the form of what Stenhouse (1975) calls "provisional specifications."

I have chosen to present my own provisional specifications in the form of principles.[1] I have based these largely on a computational model of SLA (Lantolf, 1996). This model, which has informed the bulk of the research that has investigated instructed language learning, views acquisition as taking place in the mind of learners as a result of attending to and processing the input that they are exposed to. I do not expect that all SLA researchers or all language teachers will agree with the principles, not least because the computational model is disputed by researchers who view acquisition as more of a social than a cognitive activity. I hope, though, that they will provide a basis for argument and for reflection.

Principle 1: *Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence.*

Proficiency in a second language (L2) requires that learners acquire a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which cater to fluency and immediate functional needs. Formulaic chunks such as: *What's the time?*, *I don't know*, *Can I have a __?*, and *I'm very sorry* are part of a native speaker's linguistic repertoire and are also important for L2 learners. L2 proficiency, however, also requires that learners develop a rule-based competence consisting of knowledge of specific grammatical rules in order to understand and produce novel utterances of greater complexity and accuracy (Skehan, 1998).

There is now widespread acceptance of the importance played by formulaic expressions in language use. Advances in corpus linguistics have made it possible to identify the formulaic sequences in specific language registers and testify to their frequent use (e.g., see Simpson-Vlach & Ellis's [2010] *Academic Formulas List*). Native speakers have been shown to use a much larger number of formulaic expressions than even advanced L2 learners (Foster, 2001). Formulaic expressions may also serve as a basis for the later development of a rule-based competence. N. Ellis (1996), for example, has suggested that learners bootstrap their way to grammar by first internalizing and then analyzing fixed sequences into their component parts. Classroom studies by R. Ellis (1984), Myles, Mitchell, and Hooper (1998, 1999), and Myles (2004) demonstrate that learners often internalize rote-learned material from the input they are exposed to as chunks and then break them down for analysis later on.

Traditionally, language instruction has been directed at developing rule-based competence (i.e., knowledge of specific grammatical rules) through the systematic teaching of preselected structures, what Long (1991) has referred to as a focus-on-forms approach. While such an approach certainly receives support from research that has investigated direct intervention in interlanguage development, curriculum designers and teachers need to recognize that this type of instruction may result in students learning rote-memorized patterns rather than internalizing underlying rules (Myles, 2004). This need not be seen as an instructional failure, however, as such patterns are clearly of value to the learner. It points, instead, to an acknowledgment of what can be realistically achieved by a focus-on-forms approach, especially with young beginner learners.

If formulaic chunks play a large role in early language acquisition, it may pay to focus on these (and, more generally, on vocabulary) with beginner learners, delaying the teaching

of grammar until later, as I propose in R. Ellis (2002). Lewis (1993) has argued that "language is grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar" (p. vi) and has developed his lexical approach to prioritize formulaic chunks at first. One way of achieving this is by means of a notional-functional approach. This lends itself perfectly to the teaching of routines (i.e., expressions that are completely formulaic, such as *I don't know*) and prefabricated patterns (i.e., expressions that are partly formulaic but have one or more empty slots, such as *Can I have a __?*), and may provide an ideal foundation for direct intervention in the early stages of language learning. Clearly, though, a complete language curriculum needs to ensure that it caters to the development of both formulaic expressions and rule-based knowledge.

Principle 2: *Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning.*

The term *focus on meaning* is somewhat ambiguous. It is necessary to distinguish two different senses of this term. The first refers to the idea of semantic meaning (i.e., the meanings of lexical items or of specific grammatical structures). For example, *can* in the sentence *I can swim* expresses a semantic meaning (i.e., ability). The second sense of *focus on meaning* relates to pragmatic meaning (i.e., the highly contextualized meanings that arise in acts of communication). *Can* also encodes pragmatic meaning, as when it is used in requests such as *Can you pass the salt?* To provide opportunities for students to attend to and perform pragmatic meaning, a task-based (or, at least, a task-supported) approach to language teaching is required. It is clearly important that instruction ensures opportunities for learners to focus on both types of meaning, but arguably, it is pragmatic meaning that is crucial to language learning.

There is an important difference in the instructional approaches needed for semantic versus pragmatic meaning. In the case of semantic meaning, the teacher and the students can treat language as an object and function as pedagogue and learners. But in the case of pragmatic meaning, they need to view the L2 as a tool for communicating and to function as communicators.[2] In effect, this involves two entirely different orientations to teaching and learning.

The opportunity to focus on pragmatic meaning is important for a number of reasons:

- In the eyes of many theorists (e.g., Prabhu, 1987; Long, 1996), only when learners are engaged in understanding and producing messages in the context of actual acts of communication are the conditions created for acquisition to take place.
- To develop true fluency in an L2, learners must have opportunities to create pragmatic meaning (DeKeyser, 1998).
- Engaging learners in activities during which they are focused on creating pragmatic meaning (and, therefore, treating language as a tool rather than as an object) is intrinsically motivating.

In arguing the need for a focus on pragmatic meaning, theorists do so not just because they see this as a means of activating the linguistic resources that have already been developed but because they see it as the principal means by which the linguistic resources themselves are created. This is the theoretical position that has informed many highly successful immersion education programs around the world (see Johnson & Swain, 1997). However, in advocating this principle, I do not wish to suggest that instruction needs to be directed exclusively at providing learners with opportunities to create pragmatic meaning but only that, to be effective, instruction must include such opportunities and that, ideally over an entire curriculum, they should be predominant.

Principle 3: *Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form.*

There is now a widespread acceptance that acquisition also requires that learners attend to form. Indeed, according to some theories of L2 acquisition, such attention is necessary for acquisition to take place. Schmidt (1994a), for example, has argued that there is no learning without conscious attention to form.[3]

Again, though, the term *focus on form* is capable of more than one interpretation. First, it might refer to a general orientation to language as form. Schmidt (2001) dismisses this global attention hypothesis, arguing that learners need to attend to specific forms (e.g., the *–s* on a plural noun). Second, the

term might be taken to suggest that learners need to attend only to the graphic or phonetic instantiations of linguistic forms. However, theorists such as Schmidt and Long are insistent that focus on form refers to form-function mapping (i.e., the correlation between a particular form and the meaning[s] it realizes in communication). For example, *-s* on a noun conveys the meaning "more than one." Third, *focus on form* might be assumed to refer to the awareness of some underlying, abstract rule. Schmidt, however, is careful to argue that attention to form refers to the noticing of specific linguistic items as they occur in the input to which learners are exposed, not to an awareness and understanding of grammatical rules.

Instruction can cater to a focus on form in a number of ways:

- through grammar lessons designed to teach specific grammatical features by means of input or output processing. An inductive approach to grammar teaching is designed to encourage the noticing of preselected forms; a deductive approach seeks to establish an awareness of the grammatical rule by providing learners with an explicit explanation
- through structure-based comprehension and production tasks (i.e., tasks that require learners to comprehend and process specific grammatical structures in the input, and/or to produce the structures in the performance of the task)
- through consciousness-raising tasks that assist learners to discover grammatical rules for themselves and to develop an explicit representation of them (e.g., see Eckerth, 2008a)
- through methodological options that induce attention to form in the context of performing a task; two methodological options that have received considerable attention from researchers are: (1) the provision of time for strategic and online planning (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Yuan & Ellis, 2003); and (2) corrective feedback (Lyster, 2004)

Instruction can seek to provide an *intentional* and *intensive* focus on preselected linguistic forms (as in a focus-on-forms approach or in a lesson built around a structure-based production-comprehension task or consciousness-raising task), or it can offer *incidental* and *extensive* attention to form through corrective feedback in task-based lessons. There are pros and cons for both intensive and extensive grammar instruction. Some structures may not be mastered without the opportunity for repeated practice. Harley (1989), for example, finds that Anglophone learners of L2 French failed to acquire the distinction between the *preterite* and *imparfait* past tenses after hours of exposure (and presumably some corrective feedback) in an immersion program but were able to improve their accuracy in the use of these two tenses after intensive instruction. However, intensive instruction is time consuming (in Harley's study the targeted structures were taught over an eight-week period!), and thus there will be constraints on how many structures can be addressed. Extensive grammar instruction, on the other hand, affords the opportunity for large numbers of grammatical structures to be addressed. Also, more likely than not, many of the structures will be attended to repeatedly over a period of time. Further, because this kind of instruction involves a response to the errors that each learner makes, it is individualized and affords the skilled teacher communicative opportunities for the kind of contextual analysis that Celce-Murcia (2002) recommends as a basis for grammar teaching. Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001) report that extensive instruction occurred relatively frequently in communicative adult ESL lessons through both preemptive (i.e., teacher- or student-initiated) and reactive (i.e., corrective feedback) attention to form. Loewen (2005) shows that learners who experienced such momentary form-focused episodes demonstrated the subsequent learning of the forms addressed in both immediate and delayed tests. However, it is not possible to attend to those structures that learners do not attempt to use (i.e., extensive instruction cannot deal with avoidance). Also, of course, it does not provide the in-depth practice that some structures may require before they can be fully acquired. Arguably, then, instruction needs to be conceived of in terms of both approaches.

Principle 4: *Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge.*

Implicit knowledge is procedural, is held unconsciously, and can be verbalized only if it is made explicit. It is accessed rapidly and easily and thus is available for use in rapid fluent communication.

In the view of most researchers, competence in an L2 is primarily a matter of implicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge "is the declarative and often anomalous knowledge of the phonological, lexical, grammatical, pragmatic and socio-critical features of an L2 together with the metalanguage for labelling this knowledge" (R. Ellis, 2004, p. 244). It is held consciously, is learnable and verbalizable, and is typically accessed through controlled processing when learners experience some kind of linguistic difficulty in the use of the L2. A distinction can be made between explicit knowledge as analyzed knowledge and as metalingual explanation. The former entails a conscious awareness of how a structural feature works, while the latter consists of knowledge of grammatical metalanguage and the ability to understand explanations of rules. Thus a person can possess explicit knowledge even though he or she lacks the metalanguage needed to express it. Neurolinguistic research (e.g., Ullman, 2001) indicates that different neural structures are involved in acquiring and storing these two types of knowledge.

Given that it is implicit knowledge that underlies the ability to communicate fluently and confidently in an L2, it is this type of knowledge that should be the ultimate goal of any instructional program. How, then, can it be developed? There are conflicting theories regarding this. According to Skill-Acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 1998), implicit knowledge arises from explicit knowledge when the latter is proceduralized through practice. In contrast, *emergentistism* (Krashen, 1981; N. Ellis, 1998) sees implicit knowledge as developing naturally from meaning-focused communication, aided, perhaps, by some focus on form. Irrespective of these different theoretical positions, there is consensus that learners need the opportunity to participate in communicative activities to develop implicit knowledge. Thus, communicative tasks need to play a central role in instruction directed at implicit knowledge.

The value in teaching explicit knowledge of grammar has been and remains today one of the most controversial issues in language pedagogy. To make sense of the different positions relating to the teaching of explicit knowledge, it is necessary to consider two separate questions:

1. Is explicit knowledge of any value in and of itself?
2. Is explicit knowledge of value in facilitating the development of implicit knowledge?

Explicit knowledge is arguably of value only if it can be shown that learners are able to use this type of knowledge in actual performance. Again, there is a controversy. One position is that this use is very limited. Krashen (1982) argues that learners can use explicit knowledge only when they monitor and that this requires that they be focused on form (as opposed to meaning) and have sufficient time to access the knowledge. Other positions are possible. It can be argued that explicit knowledge is used in both the process of formulating messages and in monitoring, and that many learners are adroit in accessing their explicit memories for these purposes, especially if the rules are, to a degree, automatized. Some current approaches to teaching grammar emphasize the importance of ensuring that learners develop clear and scientifically explicit rules. Systemic-functional instruction (see Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) is based on three fundamental principles: (1) the instruction needs to be organized around full and precise descriptions of the rules to be learned (as opposed to the kinds of rules of thumb that figure in many pedagogical grammars); (2) it needs to provide a material instantiation of the target concepts by means of charts and diagrams; and (3) learners need to verbalize the concept-based explanation to foster a full understanding and internalization of the concepts.

Irrespective of whether explicit knowledge has any value in and of itself, it may assist language development by facilitating the development of implicit knowledge. This involves a consideration of what has become known as the *interface hypothesis*, which addresses whether explicit knowledge plays a role in L2 acquisition. Three positions can be identified. According to the non-interface position (Krashen, 1981), explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge are entirely distinct, with the result that explicit knowledge cannot be converted into implicit knowledge. This position is supported by research that suggests that explicit and implicit memories are neurologically separate and do not interact with each other (Paradis, 1994). The interface position argues the exact opposite. Drawing on Skill-Acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 1998), this position argues that explicit knowledge becomes implicit knowledge if learners have the opportunity for plentiful communicative practice. Systemic-functional instruction is similarly premised on the assumption that

properly formulated explicit knowledge serves as the foundation for developing implicit knowledge. The weak interface position (R. Ellis, 1993) claims that explicit knowledge primes a number of key acquisitional processes, in particular *noticing* and *noticing the gap* (Schmidt, 1994a). That is, explicit knowledge of a grammatical structure makes it more likely that learners will attend to the structure in the input and carry out the cognitive comparison between what they observe in the input and their own output. These positions have not been resolved empirically and so continue to be argued at a theoretical level.

The three positions support very different approaches to language teaching. The non-interface position leads to a *zero grammar* approach, that is, one that prioritizes meaning-centered approaches such as task-based teaching. The interface position supports the idea that a grammatical structure should be first presented explicitly and then practiced by means of, first, controlled and, then, free production activities (i.e., an approach known as PPP) until it is fully proceduralized. The weak interface position has been used to provide a basis for consciousness-raising tasks (R. Ellis, 1991). These provide learners with data that illustrate a specific grammatical feature and guide learners to a discovery of the underlying rule. There has been considerable research (e.g., see Eckerth, 2008b) that has investigated whether such tasks are effective in helping learners develop explicit knowledge and whether they are subsequently able to use this in L2 production.

This principle, then, asserts that instruction needs to be directed at developing *both* implicit and explicit knowledge, giving priority to the former. However, teachers should not assume that explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge because the extent to which this is possible remains controversial and it is clear that it does not always happen. Teachers also need to recognize that different types of instructional activities are needed to develop the two types of knowledge.

Principle 5: *Instruction needs to take into account the learner's built-in syllabus.*

Early research into naturalistic SLA showed that learners follow a natural order and sequence of acquisition (i.e., they master different grammatical structures in a relatively fixed and universal order, and they pass through a sequence of stages of acquisition en route to mastering each grammatical structure). This led researchers like Corder (1967) to suggest that learners have their own "built-in syllabus" for learning grammar as implicit knowledge. By and large, the built-in syllabus is universal (i.e., it is the same irrespective of the learner's age or L1). Nevertheless, the L1 has been found to have some influence. For example, Japanese learners of English may master plural –*s* somewhat later than Spanish learners because there is no equivalent structure in Japanese whereas there is in Spanish.

Krashen (1981) famously argues that grammar instruction plays no role in the development of implicit knowledge (what he calls *acquisition*), a view based on the conviction that learners (including classroom learners) automatically proceed along their built-in syllabus as long as they have access to comprehensible input and are sufficiently motivated. He argues that grammar instruction can contribute only to explicit knowledge (i.e., learning).

A number of empirical studies were conducted to: (1) compare the order of acquisition in instructed and naturalistic learners (e.g., Pica, 1983); (2) compare the success of instructed and naturalistic learners (Long, 1983); and (3) examine whether attempts to teach specific grammatical structures resulted in their acquisition (White, Spada, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991). These studies show that, by and large, the order and sequence of acquisition is the same for instructed and naturalistic learners (e.g., R. Ellis, 1989a; Pienemann, 1989), that instructed learners generally achieve higher levels of grammatical competence than naturalistic learners, and that instruction is no guarantee that learners will acquire what they have been taught. This has led to the conclusion that it is beneficial to teach grammar but that it is necessary to ensure it is taught in a way that is compatible with the natural processes of acquisition.

How, then, can instruction take account of the learner's built-in syllabus? There are a number of possibilities:

Zero grammar approach. Adopt a zero grammar approach, as proposed by Krashen; that is, employ a task-based approach that makes no attempt to predetermine the linguistic content of a lesson.

Developmental readiness. Ensure that learners are developmentally ready to acquire a specific target feature. However, this is probably impractical because teachers have no easy way of determining which level individual students have reached and it would necessitate a highly individualized approach to cater to differences in developmental levels among the students. Also, as we noted earlier, such fine-tuning may not be necessary. While instruction in a target feature may not enable learners to "beat" the built-in syllabus, it may serve to push them along it as long as the target structure is not too far ahead of their developmental stage.

Explicit knowledge. Focus the instruction on explicit rather than implicit knowledge because explicit knowledge is not subject to the same developmental constraints as implicit knowledge. While it is probably true that some declarative facts about language are easier to master than others, this is likely to reflect their cognitive rather than their developmental complexity, which can be taken into account more easily in deciding the order of instruction. Traditional structural syllabuses, in fact, are graded on the basis of cognitive complexity.[4]

It should be noted, however, that not all researchers accept the universality and inviolability of the built-in syllabus. Skill-learning theory, for example, is premised on the assumption that *declarative knowledge* of a grammatical structure can be converted into *procedural knowledge* at any time given the right amount and type of practice. Similarly, the adoption of Vygotskian sociocultural theory "would require that we . . . eradicate the assertion that SLA progresses along a predetermined mental path" (M. Johnson, 2004, p. 172). However, these researchers do not offer evidence to support their claims—at least, not where the development of implicit knowledge is concerned.

Principle 6: *Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input.*

Language learning, whether it occurs in a naturalistic or an instructed context, is a slow and laborious process. Children acquiring their L1 take between two and five years to achieve full grammatical competence, during which time they are exposed to massive amounts of input. Ellis and Wells (1980) demonstrate that a substantial portion of the variance in speed of acquisition of children can be accounted for by the amount and the quality of input they receive. The same is undoubtedly true of SLA. If learners do not receive exposure to the target language, they cannot acquire it. In general, the more exposure they receive, the more and the faster they will learn. Krashen (1981, 1994) adopts a very strong position on the importance of input. He points to studies that have shown that length of residence in the country where the language is spoken is related to language proficiency and to other studies that that have found positive correlations between the amount of reading reported and proficiency or literacy. For Krashen, however, the input must be made *comprehensible*, either by modifying it or by means of contextual support. Other researchers (e.g., Swain, 1995) disagree with Krashen's claim that comprehensible input (together with motivation) is all that is required for successful acquisition, arguing that learner output is also important (see Principle 7), but there is wide agreement about the importance of input for developing the highly connected implicit knowledge that is needed to become an effective communicator in the L2.

How can teachers ensure their students have access to extensive input? In a second language teaching context, learners can be expected to gain access to plentiful input outside the classroom, although, as Tanaka (2004) has shown in a study of adult Japanese students learning English in Auckland, not all such learners are successful in achieving this. In a foreign language teaching context (as when French or Japanese is taught in schools in the United Kingdom or United States), there are far fewer opportunities for extensive input. To ensure adequate access, teachers need to do the following:

Maximize use of the L2 inside the classroom. Ideally, this means that the L2 needs to become the medium as well as the object of instruction, especially in a foreign language setting.[5] A study by Kim and Elder (2005) reveals that foreign language teachers of French, German, Japanese, and Korean in Auckland secondary schools varied enormously in the extent to which they employed the L2 in the classroom (i.e., between 22 and 88% of the total input).

Create opportunities for students to receive input outside the classroom. This can be achieved most easily by providing extensive reading programs based on carefully selected graded readers, suited to the level of the students, as recommended by Krashen (1989). Elley (1991) reviews studies that show that L2 learners can benefit from both reading and from being read to. Also, ideally, if more resources are available, schools need to establish self-access centers that students can use outside class time. Successful foreign language learners seek out opportunities to experience the language outside class time. Many students are unlikely to make the effort unless teachers: (1) make resources available: and (2) provide learner training in how to make effective use of the resources.

Much L2 learning is incidental rather than intentional, and this requires access to massive amounts of input. It can be claimed with confidence that, if the only input students receive is in the context of a limited number of weekly lessons based on some course book, they are unlikely to achieve high levels of L2 proficiency.

Principle 7: *Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output.*

Contrary to Krashen's insistence that acquisition is dependent entirely on comprehensible input, most researchers now acknowledge that learner output also plays a part. Skehan (1998), drawing on Swain (1995), summarizes the contributions that output can make:

- Production serves to generate better input through the feedback that learners' efforts at production elicit.
- It forces syntactic processing (i.e., obliges learners to pay attention to grammar).
- It allows learners to test hypotheses about the target language grammar.
- It helps to automatize existing knowledge.
- It provides opportunities for learners to develop discourse skills (e.g., by producing "long turns").
- It is important for helping learners to develop a "personal voice" by steering conversation to topics they are interested in contributing to.

R. Ellis (2003) adds one additional contribution of output:

- It provides the learner with "auto-input" (i.e., learners can attend to the input provided by their own production).

The importance of creating opportunities for output, including what Swain (1985) has called *pushed output* (i.e., output where the learner is stretched to express messages clearly and explicitly), constitutes one of the main reasons for incorporating tasks into a language program. Controlled practice exercises typically result in output that is limited in terms of length and complexity. They do not afford students opportunities for the kind of sustained output that theorists argue is necessary for interlanguage development. Research (e.g., Allen, Swain, Harley, & Cummins, 1990) has shown that extended talk consisting of a clause or more in a classroom context is more likely to occur when students initiate interactions in the classroom and when they have to find their own words. This is best achieved by asking learners to perform oral and written tasks.

Principle 8: *The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency.*

While it is useful to consider the relative contributions of input and output to acquisition, it is also important to acknowledge that both co-occur in oral interaction and that both cognitive-interactional (e.g., Long, 1996) and sociocultural (e.g., Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) theories of SLA have viewed social interaction as the matrix in which acquisition takes place. As Hatch (1978) famously put it, "one learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of the interaction syntactic structures are developed" (p. 404). Thus, interaction is not just a means of automatizing existing linguistic resources but also of creating new resources. According to the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), interaction fosters acquisition when a communication problem arises and learners are engaged in negotiating for meaning. The interactional modifications arising help to make input comprehensible, provide corrective feedback, and push learners to modify their own output when they repair their errors. In sociocultural theory, interaction serves

as a form of mediation, enabling learners to construct new forms and perform new functions collaboratively (Lantolf, 2000). According to this view, learning is first evident on the social plane and only later on the psychological plane. In both theories, while social interaction may not be viewed as necessary for acquisition, it is viewed as the primary source of learning.

What then are the characteristics of interaction that are deemed important for acquisition? In general terms, opportunities for negotiating meaning and plenty of scaffolding (assistance from experts) are needed. K. Johnson (1995) identifies four key requirements for interaction to create an acquisition-rich classroom:

1. creating contexts of language use where students have a reason to attend to language
2. providing opportunities for learners to use the language to express their own personal meanings
3. helping students to participate in language-related activities that are beyond their current level of proficiency
4. offering a full range of contexts that cater for a full performance in the language

Johnson suggests that these are more likely to occur when the academic task structure (i.e., how the subject matter is sequenced in a lesson) and the social participation structure (i.e., how the allocation of interactional rights and obligations shapes the discourse) are less rigid. Once again, this is more likely to be provided through tasks than through exercises. R. Ellis (1999) suggests that a key to ensuring interaction that is beneficial to acquisition is giving control of the discourse topic to the students. This, of course, is not easily achieved given that teachers have a duty to ensure that classroom discourse is orderly, which, in turn, is most easily achieved by taking control of the discourse topic by means of IRF (teacher initiates–student responds–teacher provides feedback) exchanges. Thus, creating the right kind of interaction for acquisition constitutes a major challenge for teachers.

One solution is to incorporate small-group work into a lesson. When students interact among themselves, acquisition-rich discourse is more likely to ensue. Learners speak more and use the L2 for a wider range of language functions (Long & Porter, 1985). However, there are a number of dangers in group work that may militate against this (e.g., excessive use of the L1 in monolingual groups and exposure to interlanguage errors), and some educators (e.g., Prabhu, 1987) have argued that it is more important to ensure that learners are exposed to well-formed L2 input from teacher-class interaction.

Principle 9: *Instruction needs to take into account individual differences in learners.*

While there are identifiable universal aspects of L2 acquisition, there is also considerable variability in the rate of learning and in the ultimate level of achievement. In particular, learning will be more successful when:

- The instruction is matched to students' particular aptitude for learning.
- The students are motivated.

It is probably beyond the abilities of most teachers to design lessons involving the kind of matching instruction employed in Wesche's (1981) study. This used language aptitude tests to identify different learning styles and then sought to match the kind of instruction provided to the learners' preferred approach to learning. However, teachers can cater to such variation in their students' aptitudes by adopting a flexible teaching approach involving a variety of learning activities. They can also make use of simple learner-training materials (e.g., Ellis & Sinclair, 1989) designed to make students more aware of their own approaches to learning and to develop their awareness of alternative approaches. Good language learner studies (e.g., Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1996) suggest that successful language learning requires a flexible approach to learning. Thus, increasing the range of learning strategies at the learners' disposal is one way in which teachers can help them to learn. Such strategy training needs to foster an understanding that language learning requires both an experiential and an analytical approach and to demonstrate the kinds of strategies related to both approaches. School-based students often tend to adopt an analytical approach to learning (even if this does not accord with their natural aptitude) because this is the kind of approach generally fostered in schools (Sternberg, 2002). They may have greater difficulty in adopting the kind of experiential learning required in

task-based language teaching. Some learner training, therefore, may be essential if learners are to perform tasks effectively.[4]

Dörnyei's research has shown the kinds of teaching strategies that teachers can employ to develop and maintain their students' intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei (2001) also makes the obvious point that "the best motivational intervention is simply to improve the quality of our teaching" (p. 26). Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) conducted a study of 200 high school teachers in Hungary and, based on their self-reported use of motivating strategies, identified "10 commandments" for motivating learners. Examples are "create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom" and "increase the learners' goal-orientedness." Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), in a study of EFL classrooms in Korea, find a significant positive correlation between the teacher's motivational practice and the learners' motivated behavior. These studies show that motivation is not just something learners bring to the classroom but something that can be generated inside the classroom. Teachers also need to accept that it is their responsibility to ensure that students are motivated and stay motivated. While it is probably true that teachers can do little to influence students' extrinsic motivation, there is a lot they can do to enhance their intrinsic motivation.

Principle 10: *In assessing learners' L2 proficiency, it is important to examine free as well as controlled production.*

Norris and Ortega's (2000) meta-analysis of studies investigating form-focused instruction demonstrates that the extent of the effectiveness of instruction is contingent on the way it is measured. They distinguish four types of measurement:

1. metalinguistic judgment (e.g., a grammaticality judgment test)
2. selected response (e.g., multiple choice)
3. constrained constructed response (e.g., gap-filling exercises)
4. free constructed response (e.g., a communicative task)

They find that the magnitude of effect was greatest in Types 2 and 3 and least in Type 4. Yet, arguably, it is Type 4 that constitutes the best measure of learners' L2 proficiency because it is this measure that corresponds most closely to the kind of language use found outside the classroom. The ability to get a multiple-choice question right amounts to very little if the student is unable to use the target feature in actual communication.

Free constructed responses are best elicited by means of tasks. The performance elicited by means of tasks can be assessed in three ways (R. Ellis, 2003): (1) a direct assessment of task outcomes; (2) discourse analytic measures; and (3) external ratings. Method 2 is not practical for busy classroom teachers because it requires transcribing speech and then painstakingly calculating such measures as number of error-free clauses and clause complexity. Method 3 is practical, but it requires considerable expertise to ensure that the ratings of learner performance are valid and reliable. Method 1 holds the most promise for classroom testing. However, it is possible only with closed tasks (i.e., a task for which there is a single correct outcome), such as a spot-the-difference task, where learners are asked to interact to find a specified number of differences in two similar pictures. In this task, assessment consists of establishing whether learners were able to successfully identify the differences.

FUTURE TRENDS

The 10 principles were first formulated in 2005 as part of a report for the New Zealand Ministry of Education, entitled *Instructed Language Acquisition: A Literature Review*.[5] At that time, my work in SLA was largely informed by the computational model of learning, so the principles were mainly based on this model. Since then, SLA has been increasingly influenced by more socially oriented theories of learning, in particular sociocultural theory. This theory differs from the computational model in a number of important ways, most significantly in how it views learning. In the computational model, learning occurs inside the head of the learner; the role of instruction, therefore, is to prompt the internal cognitive processes required for learning to take place. In sociocultural theory, learning is a social phenomenon; it occurs *in* the social interactions in which learners participate. Interaction, in other words, is not just a source of input but a powerful means for mediating learning. Furthermore, research

based on sociocultural theory has provided a much richer account of how interaction can assist learning than does the computational model. It has shown, for example, that the collaborative talk that learners engage in when they experience linguistic problems helps them not only to resolve these problems in targetlike ways while they are talking but also to remember the solutions and use them independently in their own language use at a later date. In short, talking about language leads to learning. Social learning is the precursor to individual learning.

The insights provided by sociocultural theory feed into a number of the existing principles, as I have indicated in this chapter (e.g., see Principle 8). But they also point to a new principle:

Principle 11: *Learners need to engage collaboratively in talk about linguistic problems and try to agree on solutions to them.*

This principle can be seen as an extension of Principle 7 (*Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output*) but it is, arguably, so important that it should be stated as a separate principle.

I am also aware of another gap. In general, the principles assume a universalistic view of L2 learning: they view language learning as involving cognitive processes that are common to all learners. To a large extent, this is true. We know, for example, that all learners follow a very similar order and sequence of acquisition (see Principle 5), and certainly having plenty of input and having the opportunity to interact in the L2 are key to successful learning for all. I have acknowledged the role of learner factors such as language aptitude and motivation in language learning (see Principle 9), but I have so far made no mention of one important area of individual difference in learners—the subjective nature of language learning. Learning a new language is not just a question of developing linguistic or communicative ability but also, potentially at least, an opportunity to acquire a new symbolic form. Learners have the opportunity to develop their subjective selves by taking on new identities and even a new personality. Learning an L2 can change how people view reality and how they see the world around them. Thus, I see a need for an additional principle:

Principle 12: *Instruction needs to take into account the subjective aspect to learning a new language.*

This principle indicates the need for instructional activities that encourage learners to engage in language play and to form an emotional identification with the target language. One way this can be achieved is through the introduction of literature and creative writing into the L2 curriculum.

Finally, I emphasize that the 12 principles I have proposed are not cast in stone. As I have just shown, they will be subject to modification as a result of new theoretical perspectives on L2 learning.

CONCLUSION

These general principles have been derived from my understanding of SLA. I have drawn on a variety of theoretical perspectives, although predominantly from the computational model of L2 learning. I am aware that this model has its limitations and is open to criticism; in particular, it is not socially sensitive because it fails to acknowledge the importance of social context and social relations in the language learning process (for an extended critique along these lines, see Block, 2003). Clearly, it would be useful to formulate a set of principles based on the broader conceptualization of SLA of the kind advocated by Block and others, but this is not my aim here. There will always be a need for a psycholinguistic account of how learners internalize new linguistic forms and how they restructure their linguistic knowledge during the process of acquisition. Social theories emphasize language use, but language use is *not* language acquisition, only a means to it. To my mind, the computational model, along with sociocultural theory, provides a solid foundation for developing a set of principles that articulate the relationships among instruction, language use, and language acquisition. It also constitutes a metaphor that teachers can easily relate to.

SUMMARY

This chapter draws together findings from a range of second language acquisition studies to formulate

a set of general principles for language pedagogy. These principles address such issues as:

- the nature of second language competence as formulaic and rule-based knowledge
- the contributions of both focus on meaning and focus on form
- the need to develop both implicit and explicit second language knowledge
- the problems posed by the learners' built-in syllabus
- the roles of input, output, and interaction in learning
- the importance of catering to individual differences in learners
- the need to assess language learning in terms of both free and controlled production

The principles are offered as provisional specifications for a learning-centered language pedagogy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that formulaic sequences and vocabulary are more important than grammar in the early stage of L2 learning?
2. Explain the difference between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning, and think of one instructional activity for each.
3. The chapter describes four ways of focusing on form (see p. 35). What do you see as the advantages and limitations of each way?
4. Given that the main goal of teaching should be to help students acquire implicit L2 knowledge, how do you think this can be best achieved?
5. What are your own views about the value of teaching explicit L2 knowledge?
6. Make a list of ways in which you can maximize the input that your students are exposed to (a) inside the classroom and (b) outside the classroom.
7. "Controlled practice exercises typically result in output that is limited in terms of length and complexity" (p. 39). Do you agree with this statement? Do you see any advantages of such exercises?
8. In many classrooms, students have only limited opportunities to interact using the L2. Why is this? What can you do to provide students with more opportunities to interact?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Observe a lesson of a teacher whom you know well. Your aim is to investigate to what extent the lesson manifests the principles of instructed language learning. You can use these questions to help you carry out your observation:

Principle 1: Do the students use formulaic chunks in the target language during the lesson? Do the students produce utterances in the target language that contain complex constructions?

Principle 2: Are there opportunities for students to focus on pragmatic meaning during the lesson? Does the lesson contain any communicative tasks? What proportion of the lesson time engages learners in processing pragmatic meaning?

Principle 3: What evidence is there of attention to form in any of these ways?

- through grammar/vocabulary/pronunciation lessons designed to teach specific linguistic features
- through focused tasks
- through methodological options designed to induce attention to form (e.g., planning, preemptive attention to form, and reactive attention to form)
- through an intentional (intensive) and incidental (extensive) approach to lessons

Principle 4: What opportunities are there for the learners to develop implicit L2 knowledge? Does the teacher attempt to teach explicit knowledge of the target language? If so, how?

Principle 5: If the lesson takes a focus-on-forms approach, what specific grammatical structure is the target of the lesson? How did the learners appear to handle this grammatical structure: (a) very easily, (b) with some difficulty, (c) with great difficulty, (d) not at all?

Principle 6: How extensive is the input that the learners are exposed to in the lesson? What does the teacher do to try to make the target language input comprehensible?

Principle 7: When the students speak in the target language, how long are their utterances typically: (a) single words, (b) short phrases, (c) full clauses, (d) multiple-clause sentences?

Principle 8: What evidence is there that negotiation of meaning is taking place? What evidence is there that the teacher is scaffolding students' attempts to use the target language? Do the students work in groups? If they do, do they use English or their L1?

Principle 9: To what extent are the instructional activities designed to take into account different learners among the students? How intrinsically motivated do the students seem to be during the instructional activities? What indicators are there of their motivation or lack of it?

2. When you have finished your observation, discuss your findings with the teacher and ask him or her to comment on them.
3. Choose an ESL or EFL textbook that you know well. To what extent do the methodological approach and the activities in the textbook accord with the principles discussed in this chapter?
4. "While it is probably true that teachers can do little to influence students' extrinsic motivation, there is a lot they can do to enhance their intrinsic motivation" (p. 41). Note the difference between extrinsic motivation (efforts made by the learner in anticipation of external rewards) and intrinsic motivation (efforts made by the learner when there are possible internal rewards). Drawing on your own experiences as a language learner or as a teacher, make a list of the strategies that teachers can use to enhance their students' intrinsic motivation.

FURTHER READING

Ellis, R. (1999). Making the classroom acquisition rich. In R. Ellis (Ed.), *Learning a second language through interaction* (pp. 211–229). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Ellis discusses how opportunities for language learning are more likely to arise when the students have the chance to initiate topics and control their development in classroom discourse.

Erlam, R., & Sakui, K. (2006). *Instructed second language acquisition: Case studies.* Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

This report presents the results of a study that investigated the classroom practice of teachers of foreign languages in terms of the extent to which this conformed to Ellis's ten principles.

Gibbons, P. (2007). Mediating academic language learning through classroom discourse. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 701–718). New York, NY: Springer.

Gibbons identifies four conditions that need to be met for what she calls "progressive discourse" to take place in the classroom.

Gray, S. (2009). From principles to practice: Teachers' uptake of principles from instructed learning to plan a focus on language in content lessons. *System, 37,* 570–584.

This article describes how a pair of secondary content teachers used Ellis's principles in an action research project to focus on form when planning a task-based lesson sequence.

Johnson, K. (1995). *Understanding communication in second language classrooms.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson distinguishes "academic task structures" (i.e., how the subject matter is sequenced in a lesson and the sequential steps involved) and "social participation structures" (i.e., how the allocation of interactional rights and obligations shapes the discourse).

Walsh, S. (2002). Construction or obstruction: teacher talk and learner involvement in the EFL classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 6, 3–24.

Walsh identifies ten features of typical language classroom discourse and then suggests ways in which teachers can both enhance and impede learners' participation in the classroom.

ENDNOTES

[1] This chapter is an expanded version of an article first published as: Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of instructed language learning. *System*, 33(2), 209–224.

[2] It is also possible to teach pragmatic meaning as an "object." That is, specific pragmatic meanings (e.g., requesting or apologizing) can be identified and instructional materials developed to teach learners the linguistic means for performing these strategies. See Kasper and Rose (2002) for examples of studies that have investigated the effectiveness of this approach. Such an approach constitutes a version of "focus on forms," discussed on p. 35. Here, however, I wish to emphasize the need to create materials that allow students to create their own pragmatic meanings through communication.

[3] The extent to which attention to form is *necessary* for learning remains controversial, however. A number of researchers (e.g., Williams, 2005) have provided evidence to demonstrate that some learning takes place without awareness. Schmidt (2001) has modified his position somewhat to allow for the possibility of nonconscious registration of linguistic form, arguing only that "more attention results in more learning" (p. 30).

[4] A good example of where cognitive complexity and developmental complexity can be distinguished is subject-verb agreement in English. This is typically introduced very early in structural courses, but it is invariably mastered only at a very advanced stage of development.

[5] In advocating use of the L2 as the medium of instruction, I do not wish to suggest that the learners' L1 has no role to play in the classroom. Polio and Duff (1994) have identified a number of ways in which the L1 can be used in the L2 classroom.

[6] Foster (1998) reports that the adult ESL learners she investigated engaged in very little negotiation of meaning when performing tasks because they failed to take them seriously. They viewed them as "games" and eschewed negotiation because it would detract from the "fun."

[7] See http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/5163