

Discussion Questions for Chapter 5: Observing learning and teaching in the second language classroom

- ① Lightbown and Spada suggest that ‘most people’ believe that learning a second language ‘on the street’ is more effective than learning it in the classroom. Does this reflect your own view? How does this suggestion tie in with what you observed in the ‘individual differences’ research you read about in Chapter 3? What are the benefits of informal out-of-class learning? What are the disadvantages?
- ② When conducting classroom-based SLA studies, what might be some advantages of using observation schemes such as the COLT? What disadvantages might there be?
- 3 Based on the classroom transcripts reproduced on pages 130–133, what do you consider to be the most important differences between structure-based and communicative L2 instruction where teacher–student interaction is concerned?
- 4 In their analysis of the student–student interaction in the two transcripts reproduced on pp. 135–137, Lightbown and Spada use the same six categories as they do for the teacher–student interaction. What are they? Do you think these categories function differently for the two different types of interaction?
- ⑤ In Lyster and Ranta’s study, what type of corrective feedback was used most frequently? Which type resulted in the most uptake? What kind(s) resulted in the least uptake? Can you speculate on some reasons for this?
- ⑥ In contrast to Lyster and Ranta, Ohta (2000) and Ellis et al. (2001) found that recasts were an effective form of error correction. What characteristics of the learners and the learning situations might explain this difference?
- 7 In their study of teacher feedback, Oliver and Mackey found differences in the way teachers responded to students during different types of classroom activities. What were the different activity types they focused on? Summarize their findings.
- ⑧ Describe the difference between display questions and referential questions. What is the difference between open and closed questions? What kinds of responses do the different question types elicit from students? How is the type of question related to the ‘wait time’ a teacher allows?
- ⑨ What is *scaffolding*? How might display questions help teachers scaffold? Why is this useful?

- 10 Students who are in intensive or compact language instruction have been found to learn more than students whose instruction is provided over an equal amount of time in 'drip-feed' courses. Assuming that teachers in both types of instruction are using a communicative approach to teaching, what differences do you think you might see in observing the classroom activities in intensive and drip-feed instruction?
- 11 What is the main methodological difference between the *classroom observation studies* and the *classroom ethnographies* reviewed by Lightbown and Spada? What different kinds of *research questions* underlie ethnographic studies?
- 12 Give two examples of cultural differences between Western-style classrooms and non-Western learning contexts (from the textbook or from your own experience/reading) that might affect second language learning success.
- 13 In her longitudinal ethnographic study of primary-age ESL learners in Vancouver, Toohey (1998) found that some common classroom practices in Grade 1 and 2 classrooms made them poor L2 learning environments for the minority-language children she studied. What were these practices? Why might they impact negatively on SLA?