

# Classroom Decision-Making

Negotiation and process  
syllabuses in practice

*Edited by*

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# 1 The significance of negotiation

Michael P. Breen and Andrew Littlejohn

In this chapter, we explore the origins, rationale and nature of negotiated work in a language classroom, setting the scene for the practical accounts which follow. We will principally be concerned therefore with three sets of questions:

1. What is negotiation? Which particular form of negotiation is the focus of this book?
2. What are the justifications for negotiating with students in a language class? What is the rationale for negotiation?
3. Which classroom decisions may be negotiable? How does negotiation relate to a process syllabus?

Although these issues are related to one another, we will explore them in turn in the three sections that follow. As we shall see, the broader concept of ‘negotiation’ is rather like a river, arising from a variety of small streams and gathering its own momentum eventually to pour in quite different directions over a flood plain. Its theoretical sources are diverse. As it has attracted greater interest in terms of its relevance to research and practice, it has become more defined and differentiated so that it no longer has a single meaning. As this book focuses upon only one of these meanings, it is important to clarify from the outset what we intend by the term and how it is implemented in practice by the contributors to this collection. Building on this initial definition, we will then elaborate upon negotiation in the classroom in more detail by tracing some of the influences that have shaped it and by enumerating the main principles underlying its role in language pedagogy in particular. Finally, we will address certain practical implications for classroom decision-making by describing the relationship between negotiation and a process syllabus in the context of a language course or curriculum. In this chapter, therefore, the focus is upon the theory or philosophy of negotiation as a preliminary to teachers’ accounts of its practical application in Chapters 2 to 17. In Chapter 18, we will draw theory and practice together in deducing what may be learned from both.

## **Forms of negotiation**

Negotiation typifies and generates the ways we communicate through written or spoken texts. We can distinguish three kinds of negotiation in terms of the main purposes they serve in particular contexts of communication. We may call these personal, interactive and procedural negotiation. All three involve a struggle for meaning and all three entail the reduction of our uncertainty during learning or communication – both psychological uncertainty and, to differing extents, social or interpersonal uncertainty. All three are related and can co-occur.

### *Personal negotiation*

Personal negotiation is primarily a psychological process because it engages such mental capacities as discriminating, analysing and synthesising, memorising or recalling, and so on. When we interpret meaning from what we read or hear, negotiation occurs between the potential meanings of the written or spoken text and those meanings which we ourselves can attribute to that text from our previous knowledge and experience (Widdowson, 1978). For example, we are all familiar with the experience of ‘gaining’ more meaning than we had given previously to a novel or a poem when we read it a second time and with our inclination to superimpose our own interpretations upon items in a news broadcast. Such interpretative negotiation is likely to result in different meanings being derived from the same text by different people. Similarly, when we express meaning in what we write or say, we have to negotiate between what we intend to mean and our knowledge of the forms of expression which the rules and conventions of writing and speaking will allow. In certain situations, we are well aware of the frustrations of struggling for the right word or form of expression, whilst we are likely to be most conscious of this mental negotiation when we are trying to write something which we want to make very clear.

Negotiation in this sense therefore refers to the unobservable and complex mental processing that occurs in our search for understanding and our efforts to be understood. This kind of negotiation underlies all the negotiating we do. Meaning is made in our heads, although, of course, the meanings we interpret and express are likely to have been learned in previous social activities and can be regarded as having their roots in the cultural and social worlds which we inhabit. The second two kinds of negotiation are motivated by this mental process and, in turn, serve to influence it in an ongoing way. If we seek meaning through language, personal negotiation is unavoidable whilst interactive

and procedural negotiation are always optional and located in overt social activity.

### *Interactive negotiation*

The original use of the term ‘negotiation’ in the sense we refer to it here derives from researchers investigating the nature of conversational interaction (Garfinkel, 1967). Here the negotiation is overtly social and occurs when people use language either to indicate their understanding or their failure to understand (or, indeed, believe) what another person has said, or in order to modify and restructure their language to make things clearer so that they will be understood. The significance of this for language learning was originally recognised by Evelyn Hatch when she explored how learning might actually *derive* from the kinds of interaction in which learners may be involved (Hatch, 1978). This radical departure from the accepted view that the capacity to communicate was an outcome of the necessary *prior and explicit* learning of the forms of language coincided with Krashen’s influential argument that language acquisition primarily depends upon the provision to learners of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981; 1985).

In representing a synthesis of Hatch’s assertion of the importance of conversation and Krashen’s assertion of the centrality of appropriate input, M. Long identified the interactive process as pivotal for language acquisition. He elaborated upon the interaction in which a listener requests clarification of someone else’s message and the speaker subsequently repeats, simplifies or elaborates upon the original message as the location in which teachers and learners seek and create comprehensible input (M. Long, 1981). He was encouraged in this view by his and others’ discovery that this kind of modified interaction occurred more frequently when native speakers communicated with non-native speakers and even more frequently when non-native speakers communicated with each other, particularly in language learning tasks. Debates on the relative contributions of input and interaction have characterised much of second language acquisition (SLA) research since the mid-1970s. Long and other researchers who acknowledged the centrality of conversational interaction in SLA later adopted the term ‘negotiation’ to describe it and, more recently, specified it as ‘negotiation for meaning’ (for a review of this work, see Pica, 1994). Interactive negotiation, therefore, occurs in an ongoing and usually spontaneous way within immediate social activity. From the perspective of language acquisition research, however, it also has a psycholinguistic purpose in that it is seen as a facilitative means for generating comprehensible input.

*Procedural negotiation*

The primary function of personal and interactive negotiation is to uncover and share meaning. Like interactive negotiation, whilst it is also overt and social in nature, the primary focus of procedural negotiation is less upon meaning than upon reaching agreement. Although both understanding and sharing meaning are entailed in the process, these are subordinate to the main aim of procedural negotiation. This kind of negotiation is exemplified by discussions between people who are likely to have different interests or different points of view but who seek to reach agreement on a matter, solve a shared problem or establish ways of working that are acceptable to them. This view of negotiation is probably the interpretation that is used most in everyday usage, and it is regularly used to refer to what diplomats, or trade unions and employers do when differences between various parties arise.

Its relevance to language learning arises because, for many people, such learning occurs in the social context of a classroom. Here, the primary function of procedural negotiation is managing teaching and learning as a group experience. There are certain key decisions which have to be made within this process. These include: who will work with whom, in what ways, with what resources and for how long, upon what subject matter or problem, and for what purposes. In other words, decisions have to be made with regard to the purposes of the work, its particular focus or content, and the ways in which it will be undertaken in the classroom group. In addition, we need to know the extent to which the actual decisions made have been appropriate in enabling the achievement of the chosen objectives. Outcomes from the process have to be evaluated in some way. Conventionally, it is assumed that it is the role of the teacher to make these decisions, both covertly as part of planning and classroom management and through overt instructions to students at key moments in a lesson. As we see in the next part of this chapter, there are several justifications for raising such decisions to the level of overt negotiation *with* students. However, one major justification echoes what we identified as the motivations for both personal and interactive negotiation: reaching and sharing understanding.

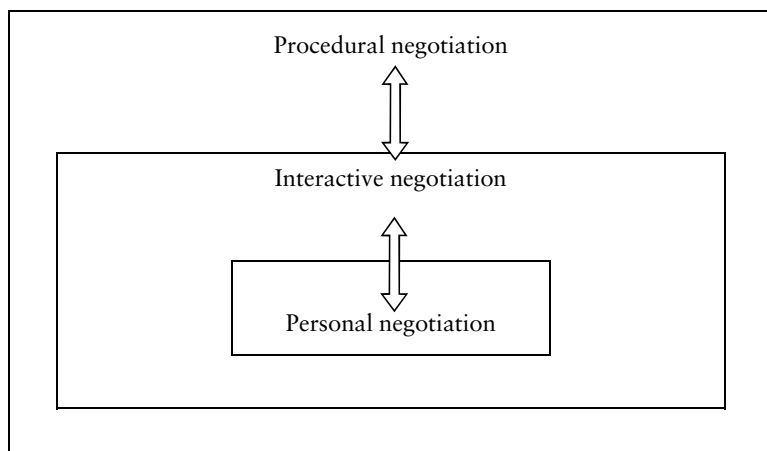
We can exemplify this motive in classroom language learning with reference to the common situation of a teacher having to lead students through a pre-designed syllabus which entails specific learning objectives. The teacher has to mediate between the requirements of the syllabus and the different learning agendas of the students in the class. These diverse personal agendas are shaped by the students' prior knowledge and experience, including their earlier experiences of classroom learning. Learning agendas comprise the learners' own learning



priorities, their changing learning needs, their different preferred strategies and styles of learning, the different value and functions they give to the language classroom and the people in it, and so on. Such agendas inevitably generate a wide range of interpretations – some of which are unconscious – of the objectives of learning and appropriate content. Similarly, there are a range of preferred ways of learning and differences in how people think they should work in a classroom setting. However, the teacher often has to navigate all the students through a set syllabus towards specific objectives. To achieve this, and responding to emerging learner needs and difficulties, the teacher is the person who most often makes decisions of the kind we identified earlier. The result is the *actual* syllabus of the classroom which is an unfolding compromise between the original pre-designed syllabus and the individual teacher's alertness to those aspects of learner agendas that may be revealed during classroom work.

The teacher's interpretation of a syllabus and reasons for classroom decisions are usually covert. Similarly, learners' own unfolding interpretations of what is done in the classroom and how it relates to their own learning agendas are rarely the focus of overt consideration. Just as the compromise syllabus is essentially the teacher's creation, so it is also differentially interpreted by the students, and it is unlikely to accommodate the more opaque aspects of the diverse language learning agendas of the classroom group. The result is likely to be a lack of harmony between the different versions of syllabuses in the class that, in turn, has the potential to inhibit, disrupt or delay the learning process.

A major purpose of procedural negotiation in the classroom is, therefore, to reach a shared understanding at appropriate moments in classroom work of both the requirements that may be implicit in, for example, an external syllabus or the teacher's experientially informed view of efficient ways of working and the different learning agendas in the class. Through this ongoing process of explicit accommodation, a collective language curriculum of the classroom group can be gradually evolved. Procedural negotiation in the language classroom comprises overt and shared decision-making through which alternative assumptions and interpretations are made clear, the range of achievements and difficulties in the work are identified, and preferences and alternatives in ways of working can be revealed and chosen so that the teaching-learning process within a class can be as effective as possible. *It is this kind of procedural negotiation and the practical experiences of it that is the focus of this book and which defines the nature of a process syllabus.*



*Figure 1.1 Relationship between three kinds of negotiation*

### *Negotiation and language learning*

Although we have emphasised the potential contribution of procedural negotiation to the language classroom, all three forms of negotiation which we have identified are highly relevant for language learning. Learners must engage in personal negotiation as a psychological process in order to learn to interpret and express meaning in a new language. If given appropriate scope to occur, interactive negotiation (sharing, checking and clarifying meanings) and procedural negotiation (reaching agreement on decisions) will be part of the communicative and social activity of a language class. Also, and importantly, all three are related. As Figure 1.1 illustrates, the relationship is one of interactivity and entailment. Procedural negotiation entails interactive negotiation for meaning; the search for agreement in decisions requires the resolution of failures to understand or the struggle to be clear. Interactive negotiation is motivated by the wish to interpret personally what is said or express a particular point of view. We can also describe the process in reverse, where the personal struggle to express meaning, for example, is likely to entail noticing when one is not understood and the consequent effort to reformulate or elaborate on one's meaning. Such interactive work will occur in an ongoing and spontaneous way while seeking agreement in relation to a decision about classroom work.

A major significance of procedural negotiation for the language classroom is that it calls upon and activates both personal and interactive negotiation while, in turn, contributing to their scope and quality

during learning. All three are mutually supportive processes for developing the capacity to communicate in a new language.

In identifying procedural negotiation of classroom decisions as the particular focus of this book, we have so far emphasised two of its purposes. First, when language learning is undertaken in a classroom group, negotiation is a means for developing a harmonious relationship between three teaching–learning agendas: any external requirements upon the learning in terms of pre-specified knowledge and capabilities, individual learning agendas and the evolving collective curriculum of the group. Second, procedural negotiation entails and engages personal and interactive negotiation as processes for the expression of meanings and the sharing of understandings. All three kinds of negotiation underlie and refine a person’s use of language. When we consider the learning of a language, we readily recognise that personal and interactive negotiation are essential. A central argument here is that one of the major purposes of procedural negotiation in a language class is to intensify opportunities for the enactment of personal and interactive negotiation. There are, however, additional and deeper justifications for negotiated decision-making of this kind which we explore in the next section.

## **The rationale for negotiation**

In this section, we present a number of key principles on which negotiation in the language classroom rests. These principles have a long history and express a range of motivations for negotiation with students in classroom settings. We begin, however, with a brief account of influences from theory, research and practice that have shaped them.

### *The roots of the concept of negotiation in learning*

It is not too grandiose a claim to suggest that the direct engagement of students in their learning through democratic decision-making has its roots in the Enlightenment and classical liberalism. The original concept of liberalism, becoming enacted in the gradual spread of democratic forms of government subsequent to the French Revolution, has since been colonised and thereby distorted by state and corporate capitalism – as has the word ‘democracy’ which, in our own times, is often appealed to on behalf of policies and actions of the powerful that are the least democratic. However, the principles of classical liberalism informed what Bertrand Russell identified as ‘the humanist conception’ of social development in the first part of the twentieth century. Both Russell in Europe and John Dewey in the USA explored the

## *The significance of negotiation*

relationships between an emergent democratic society and an educational enterprise that might give rise to democratic citizenship.

Russell saw education as a means for asserting values over domination and compliance and, crucially, as a means for developing a wise and creative citizenry of a free community to replace the more inequalitarian and dehumanising features of the industrial revolution (B. Russell, 1926). Dewey, writing on education mainly in the years of the Great Depression of the 1930s coincident with the rise of dictatorships in Europe, asserted a humanist conception of education in the context of what he saw as a real struggle for genuine democracy. The expansion of corporate industrial power represented to him, an evolved form of feudal and elitist social structure that classical liberalism had sought to replace. He saw education in the twentieth century as the means towards freedom and independence in thought and action within a co-operative venture towards common goals for the good of the majority rather than a plutocratic minority. And he believed that the educational process should encourage open-mindedness, wholehearted involvement and, significantly, a sense of responsibility to oneself and the wider community (Dewey, 1933; 1938).

The wellspring of these proposals within a humanist conception of education, virtually choked by the horrendous divisions of the Second World War and the subsequent 'Cold War' between western interests and those of state communism, later came to the surface in two distinct streams of theory and research. The first emerged in the work of psychologists who asserted a perspective on human beings as more active agents in their own learning than behaviourism had allowed. The second, coinciding with the significant cultural innovations of the 1960s, emerged in the critical assessments of dominant models of western education by a large number of writers. These streams of influence touched upon or anticipated significant developments in linguistics which were to have a later impact upon both research in second language learning and upon language pedagogy.

The innovations in the psychology of learning were exemplified by the work of George Kelly, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers in the 1950s and 1960s. Kelly based his influential notions regarding how we conceptualise our world through personal constructs on the view that all learning is analogous to scientific investigation and the construction of empirically or, more precisely, experientially informed theories (Kelly, 1955). A central idea in his view was that we learn, not by forming habits of behaviour or accumulating wisdom as it is presented to us, but when confronted with discontinuity, puzzles or paradoxes. We best learn at moments when we *must* reduce our own uncertainty. Maslow and Rogers, reflecting a strong focus on the individual that exemplified

western psychology, somewhat misleadingly interpreted humanism primarily in terms of a 'person-centred' agenda for 'self-actualisation' through education. In most thoroughly exploring the facilitative role of the teacher within such an agenda, Rogers directly addressed the power and control relations that he saw as existing in 'conventional' education (Rogers, 1969). He envisioned teachers as providing the 'psychological climate' in which learners are able to take responsible control over their own learning. Although identifying power and control as located in interpersonal relations, he did not extend his vision to broader political and social action. This wider perspective would arise later from other sources, mainly European. However, Rogers, like Maslow, argued for a reduction of emphasis upon content-based and fixed-learning outcomes in favour of opening up a space for learners' diversity in learning needs and objectives through a focus upon the process or experience of learning which could be seen as generative and of life-long value. These 'humanistic' perspectives were carried through in certain new directions in language teaching in the 1970s, particularly in the USA exemplified by Moskovitz (1978) and the innovations described by Stevick (1976; 1990). However, as we shall see, another critic of the behaviourist constructs of human learning was to have a significant, though perhaps indirect, impact upon second language teaching.

Meantime, of even more long-term significance for the roots of procedural negotiation in the classroom, and coincident with the growing civil-rights movement, more overtly critical perspectives on the inequalities and divisiveness of contemporary American education were being identified in the work of Holt (1964), Kohl (1968) and Kozol (1967), among others. Their demands for school reform were expressed in terms of the urgent need for more socially inclusive and explicitly democratic forms of pedagogy and curricula (Postman and Weingartner, 1969). Dewey's original agenda was being rewritten at a time when his predictions about the underlying inequalities of American society were being more widely acknowledged.

Educators outside the USA were, meantime, widening this debate. Ivan Illich (1971) asserted that conventional schooling had gone beyond redemption not least because it served the interests of power and wealth in its construction of compliant consuming citizens. Like Russell before him, Illich asserted the need for a return to 'vernacular values' and he identified these as being rooted in community endeavour that was typified by authentic democracy. Paulo Freire's work, primarily in adult literacy in Latin America, similarly located emancipatory education within local cultural action and proposed worthwhile learning as essentially an outcome of social collaboration (Freire, 1970; 1972). Recently, Freire's ideas in particular have been taken up most directly in

relation to language teaching through Auerbach's proposals concerning a participatory pedagogy (Auerbach, 1990; 1995; see also Wolfe-Quintero, Chapter 17 of this volume).

In Britain, echoing Russell's and Dewey's liberal democratic agenda for the schooling of young people with an emphasis upon collaborative responsibility rather than competition, and choice rather than coercion, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a range of practical initiatives within mainstream, state schooling. These included the Plowden Committee's learning-centred agenda for primary education (Plowden, 1967) and the establishment of the first comprehensive high schools intended to replace the binary division between grammar schools (which selected their intake on the basis of seeming academic potential) and secondary schools (for all other students). Both these initiatives attracted strong resistance at the time and ever since from more conservative circles. Coincident with such innovation was a growing interest in less conservative circles in alternative forms of schooling, perhaps most notably in A. S. Neill's Summerhill in which he had transformed liberal views of education into practice thirty years previously, at a time when Russell's and Dewey's ideas were still relatively new (Neill, 1937; 1962; Hennings, 1972).

More liberal directions in practice coincided with critical explorations in theory. Detailed analyses of the transmission of knowledge in schooling in terms of an asymmetry of power and its implications for control in the teaching-learning process were undertaken by a number of British sociologists of education (for example, Bernstein, 1967; Young, 1971). In terms of curriculum innovation, the tenor of this debate in Britain was, perhaps, most accessibly articulated in Lawrence Stenhouse's work (Stenhouse, 1975). In the same climate of critical evaluation, and echoing Bernstein's ideas regarding access to, and control of, knowledge, Douglas Barnes and his co-writers challenged prevailing transmission modes of education with specific reference to the language used in schools and classrooms (Barnes *et al.*, 1969). This remarkable critique initiated a focus among educators upon language across the whole curriculum and anticipated Britten's assertion of the need to see students as active communicating participants rather than quiet spectators in schooling, and Barnes' exploration of small group processes as a means for genuinely interpretative learning. Later advocates of direct student participation through their negotiation of aspects of curriculum, particularly aspects relating to language and literacy, have often cited the work of these authors as highly influential (see, for example, Boomer *et al.*, 1992).

This remarkable upsurge of ideas and action of the 1960s and 1970s flows more recently into the assertively critical work on education in

feminist writing and within what we may identify with a post-modern perspective. It is within these that European tributaries of theory and research on emancipatory forms of education begin to dominate the landscape, although the writings of Giroux (1981) and Apple (1986), both North American, perhaps most directly explore implications for teaching and learning in the coming time. Such writers, echoing some of the critics of the limitations of education in the 1960s and 1970s, share the view that pedagogy based upon genuine dialogue both between teachers and taught and also between students is a crucial process characterising emancipatory educational practices. This concern with the contrast between emancipatory and oppressive pedagogies exemplifies European post-modern critiques of contemporary society which derive much of their evidence from theory and research on discourse (amongst others, see Fairclough, 1989). A particular critical stance in our own language teaching profession which identifies coercion and colonisation through certain language education practices has been taken up by a number of writers (see, for example, contributors to Tollefson, 1995). Of course, the post-modern critique of what is seen as the oppressive role of conventional education in our present society goes much further than a humanist or liberal stance, actually questioning the Enlightenment reliance upon 'rationality' and the plausibility of a classical liberalism agenda. What, though, of the more direct impact of this evolution of thinking upon the teaching of language? The twin influences of the 'humanistic conception' of Russell and Dewey and a recognition of the essentially social nature of the learning process – expressed through the critique of its failure to be genuinely democratic in meeting the needs of different groups of learners – can also be traced in certain key developments in views of language learning and teaching since the 1970s.

Chomsky shared with 'humanistic' psychologists a critical disdain for the limitations of behaviourist views of learning but from the perspective of Cartesian and, thereby, Enlightenment thinking, whilst also signalling radical directions for linguistics (Chomsky, 1968). He asserted that he had little to say about language teaching, but his views on the untutored nature of language acquisition and our underlying competence of language knowledge have had lasting effects upon theory and research in our field. Debates about what is innate and what is or is not teachable have dominated second language acquisition (SLA) theory and research to the present time, while the notion of competence, coinciding with the remarkable emergence of sociolinguistic research in the early 1970s, indirectly shaped possibly the most significant shift in our views about language pedagogy in recent years. In what follows, we briefly trace each of these two developments.

Chomsky's assertion, supported by child language research in the 1970s, that a child acquires his or her first language largely without overt teaching by caretakers was extrapolated as part of the first substantial theory of SLA in terms of Krashen's distinction between acquisition and learning and, especially, the primacy of the former. For Krashen, the crucial condition for acquisition to take place was the provision to the learner of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981; 1985). To date, the significance he attributed to the primacy of the meaning of a new language as the crucible for acquisition remains largely unquestioned in mainstream SLA research except in the matter of how learners might best develop it. Building upon the growth of later studies in first language acquisition which identified interaction between caretakers and young children as the arena for language development, Long launched a research agenda for SLA – currently identified as a 'social interactionist' perspective – which sees interactive negotiation as the means for the creation and uptake of comprehensible input (M. Long, 1981). From such a perspective, the process of language acquisition is extended beyond the mere interaction between input data and the learner's mind to overt negotiation for meaning within social relationships.

The presently influential social interactionist research in SLA also identifies the seminal work of Evelyn Hatch as a formative influence. Through her analysis of the discourse of caretakers and language learners, Hatch revealed that the kinds of conversation in which they participated provided highly appropriate scaffolding for the learning of new linguistic forms (Hatch, 1978; 1992). This concept of scaffolding derives, of course, from the work of Vygotsky who explicitly located learning both *within* social activity and *as* social activity (Vygotsky, 1962). A central process in Vygotsky's account of learning is the scaffolding during a shared activity provided by social interaction between a learner who is not yet capable of independently achieving something and a person who is already knowledgeable and capable. As Hatch revealed when examining caretaker interaction with young learners, caretaker contributions to the flow of conversation, elaboration or reformulation of learner utterances, and input of appropriate vocabulary at certain moments all enabled young learners to contribute to the conversation and to express and understand new meanings. For Vygotsky, the potential for development through social interaction with someone more capable is greater than that which a learner can achieve independently; the difference being referred to as the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1962).

In terms of current directions in the psychology of education, it is significant that the work of Vygotsky is seemingly being rediscovered,



not least in the language-teaching profession. His ideas are currently seen to inform a 'sociocultural' perspective on language teaching which partly echoes humanist psychological views of the learner as an *active agent* in the process (Lantolf, 1994; Lantolf and Appel, 1994). However, following the ideas of Leont'ev, one of Vygotsky's successors, sociocultural theory identifies agency as social action and places it within particular contexts or 'activity'. 'Activity' is used in a special sense by sociocultural theorists to refer to the inter-personal nature or inter-subjectivity of collaborative action, the specific settings of collaborative action, and how actions are actually carried out in those settings (Leont'ev, 1981; Donato and McCormick, 1994).

Turning from views on how language is acquired to Chomsky's concept of underlying competence, the almost simultaneous emergence and expansion of sociolinguistic research enabled Dell Hymes to challenge the apparent narrow mentalism of Chomsky's formulation of underlying linguistic knowledge and to extend it in terms of our knowledge of appropriate *use* of language in social situations (Hymes, 1971). It is fair to suggest that Hymes' notion of communicative competence provided one of the key theoretical reference points for the most significant development in language teaching from the late 1970s onwards. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) reflected a sea change which initially extended our view of the aims and content of language courses. The focus shifted to language use and specifically in terms of notions or frameworks of meaning and, in particular, communicative functions within discourse (Widdowson, 1978). Language learning therefore came to be seen as the development of a range of competencies for use in addition to linguistic knowledge (Canale and Swain, 1980).

Largely because of the significant impetus provided by functionally based pedagogic frameworks of language developed at that time by the Council of Europe, debates about the distinctiveness of CLT centred upon what should be the aims and subject matter of language teaching. Innovations in the design of content syllabuses therefore tended to dominate early formulations; defining language use upstaged discussions of how teaching might contribute to its actual development. Perhaps inevitably, this initial narrow focus prefaced the subsequent fragmentation of what the profession intended by the term 'communicative language teaching' so that there are now different lines of development emerging from it. For some proponents of CLT, a primary concern with communicative objectives and content persists, as in certain special-purpose course designs or in a concern with authenticity of classroom texts. For others, *how* the capacity to use language is acquired is the more significant issue. Informed by developments in

second language acquisition research, various ‘task-based’ approaches to language teaching may be seen to exemplify this concern (Long and Crookes, 1992). Similarly, ‘learner-centred’ syllabus design, minimally in terms of the analysis of learner needs or more overtly involving degrees of negotiation with learners, appears to reflect a stronger focus on learning than upon the content to be learned (Nunan, 1988b; Tudor, 1996).

Just prior to these two developments and in direct response to the initial preoccupation within the CLT movement with appropriately communicative syllabuses, Breen and Candlin proposed a broader *curriculum* framework for CLT. This articulation of a broader view of the possibilities of CLT was influenced by developments in how socio-linguists were investigating and describing language use, by the critiques of prevailing transmission modes of education, and by emerging strands within second language acquisition research at that time (Breen and Candlin, 1980). Defining CLT in curriculum terms enabled language content and classroom methodology to be seen as inextricably related and a specifically communicative perspective on the teaching–learning *process* in the classroom could therefore be explored. A central tenet derived from this perspective was that teachers and students should have the opportunity to undertake procedural negotiation in relation to the curriculum on which they are working as a facilitative and authentic environment for the personal and interactive negotiation processes which current research was identifying as underlying the use and learning of language. Given the preoccupation in the early 1980s with what should serve as appropriate communicative syllabuses (Brumfit, 1984), both writers further explored the implications of negotiation for syllabus design in particular.

Candlin argued that any pre-designed syllabus was rendered redundant from the moment teacher and students began working and that the only genuine syllabus would be a retrospective account of what the work had covered and what had been achieved from it (Candlin, 1984). Breen formulated the concept of a process syllabus in order to locate the conventional content syllabus more explicitly *within* and as *mediated by* the teaching–learning process. In addition, a process syllabus was proposed as a reference point for teachers who wished to engage students explicitly in evolving the actual curriculum of the classroom. The place of such procedural negotiation within the framework of a process syllabus is the focus of the third section of this chapter (see pp. 29ff.). First we need to summarise the theoretical and research motivations for negotiation in the language classroom to which we have so far referred.

*The principles underlying negotiation in the language classroom*

This necessarily brief historical account of some of the main theoretical and empirical roots of procedural negotiation in language teaching has identified four major perspectives. First, a view of learning contextualised in a wider society in which student responsibility and co-operation during learning can be seen as expressing and enabling participation as a citizen in democratic processes. Second, a view of learning as emancipatory, in contrast to ‘conventional’ education which may be socially divisive and requiring compliance to the hegemony of a dominating minority. Third, a view of learning as located in social and cultural action wherein what is learned and how it is learned are collaboratively shaped. Finally, a view of the learner as an active agent of his or her learning in which the interpretation and control of knowledge is an attribute of the learner rather than as someone positioned as a mere recipient of selected and transmitted knowledge previously determined as appropriate by others.

In addition to these four perspectives on learning and the learner, our historical overview also identified certain key developments in language pedagogy. Second language research identifies interactive negotiation for meaning within discourse as the crucible for acquisition. A basic tenet of communicative language teaching is that the student is learning to become a member of a new speech community through the development of communicative competence. Personal and interactive negotiation for meaning underlie such competence. Given that many learners learn a language in a classroom group, it has been argued from the perspective of communicative language teaching that opportunities for overt negotiation about the classroom curriculum provide a springboard for the other forms of negotiation and for authentic language use about matters that are of immediate significance to learners.

The principles underlying the use of negotiation in the language classroom can therefore be derived from these four perspectives on learning and the learner and from these more specific proposals within second language research and pedagogy. Given that such perspectives and proposals often flow into one another, even from diverse tributaries of thinking and research, the principles we deduce inevitably overlap. However, six key principles can be identified as follows:

- Negotiation is a means for responsible membership of the classroom community.
- Negotiation can construct and reflect learning as an emancipatory process.

## *The significance of negotiation*

- Negotiation can activate the social and cultural resources of the classroom group.
- Negotiation enables learners to exercise their active agency in learning.
- Negotiation can enrich classroom discourse as a resource for language learning.
- Negotiation can inform and extend a teacher's pedagogic strategies.

In the following sections, we briefly elaborate upon each of these principles in turn.

Negotiation is a means for responsible membership of the classroom community

If we are to learn anything from the history of the twentieth century, it seems clear that mere compliance and consumption in line with the hegemony of the powerful and wealthy actually undermine the rights and security of many people. The coming time appears to need, perhaps more than ever before, people who are self-reliant and flexible in their working lives, socially responsible rather than merely self-seeking and collaborative rather than competitive in their dealings with other people. Genuine liberty as exercised through democratic processes depends on informed, questioning citizens who are capable of choosing and discarding and who can think issues through and take responsibility for their decisions and, crucially, be responsible for the impact of such decisions on others.

Any classroom, in its social composition, is a microcosm of the wider society in which it is located. For it to function, a classroom community realises its own values and priorities through either implicitly or explicitly accepted procedures and routines. In this way, a classroom culture can be more or less democratic in the original meaning of this term. The more explicitly ways of working are agreed, the more likely a collaborative approach to achieving shared goals can be fostered. Inevitable tensions between the priorities of the individual in relation to the group are more likely to be worked through and resolved. Additionally, the class of learners is more likely to see itself as a learning community with mutual responsibilities. This may perhaps be seen as a large agenda for the language classroom. However, if we accept that learning a language in a group is inherently a social process with the likely purpose of becoming a member of another community of speakers, we may see that the concept of community endeavour may not be inappropriate.

As a number of feminist and post-modern thinkers in education have argued, our present social and political conditions signal an urgent need

for classroom pedagogies that enable learners to uncover the relationship of knowledge to power and vested interests. In this sense, learning a language might be seen as either the taking on of a potentially oppressed identity (see, amongst others, Tollefson, 1995) or as a means of access to greater personal adaptability and influence. It has the potential to provide the student with cultural and intellectual resources and, thereby, the practical means and strategies to seek further knowledge and to challenge structures in society that operate in an oppressive way. Learning a language can also facilitate understanding of cultural diversity and provide access to such diversity as a resource. The recognition and maintenance of cultural diversity is both a means towards and an attribute of genuine democracy. As Nancy Lester put it, negotiation in the classroom, in its microcosmic way, can serve as ‘a process through which our beliefs about and our enactments in the social, political, and cultural spheres might be transformed’ (Lester, 1992: 214). Perhaps the most obvious enactment of these spheres in the classroom – though not the only one – can be seen in the conventional institutional roles of the teacher and the learners. Negotiation between teacher and learners and among learners necessarily entails different ways of enacting these roles. In this way, it may support learners’ capabilities to participate in a responsible and self-empowering manner in the world beyond the classroom and, crucially, as a member of a new speech community and culture.

Negotiation can construct and reflect learning as an emancipatory process

A pedagogy that does not directly call upon students’ capacities to make decisions conveys to them that either they are not allowed to or that they are incapable of doing so; or it may convey that the more overt struggle to interpret and plan is not part of ‘proper’ learning. In classrooms that require conformity to externally determined decisions mediated through the teacher and/or to those of the teacher, students have to try to make sense of the curriculum covertly as best they can or withdraw into surviving as an individual not wishing to appear out of place. Learning becomes, at best, a lonely guessing game or, at worst, simply oppressive.

The potential for emancipation can be identified in a learner’s stance as a citizen in the wider society and as a seeker of new knowledge and capabilities in *any* context. Additionally, as we have argued, entering a language community as a new member has emancipatory potential. When a person enters a classroom he or she may or may not be enabled to exercise autonomy, the active expression of emancipation.

## *The significance of negotiation*

Autonomous action is typified by thinking and acting according to one's own principles rather than habitually conforming to someone else's. It can, thereby, express the relationship to oneself as a learner. In the context of a transmissive classroom, the learner is most often obliged to 'exercise' this autonomy by conforming to the ways knowledge, teaching and learning have been defined previously by others. Autonomy becomes enacted as overtly passive and individualist. A classroom based upon negotiated knowledge and procedures allows the learner to exercise autonomy on an equal footing with others in the group and as a contribution to the good of the learning community.

Negotiation within the classroom therefore promotes a learner's power of learning and interdependency in learning when appropriate. However, negotiation entails freedom with discipline. It does *not* mean 'anything goes'. Collaborative decision-making requires the constant balancing of an individual agenda with everyone else's. It also requires the constant balancing of particular goals, be they negotiable or not, with personal purposes and preferences for learning. In the classroom group, genuine autonomy has to be exercised in an interdependent way. Autonomous learning within a group also requires opportunities for critical self-reflection in relation to the learning and ongoing group reflection at appropriate moments so that outcomes from shared decisions can be traced. Classroom negotiation entails evaluation of outcomes from activities and how they were undertaken as a pivotal moment for such reflection. The exercise of emancipatory learning in a classroom can therefore be identified as the shared task of evolving and adapting the curriculum according to emerging needs, difficulties and achievements. Through this, learners construct and reconstruct their own learning both as individuals and as a group, and this kind of social action can also contribute to a learner's self-directed learning beyond the classroom and into the wider community.

Negotiation can activate the social and cultural resources of the classroom group

The knowledge constructed in a classroom, because it evolves through a collective process – through the texts, the classroom discourse and the social practices of the group – is greater than any single individual could create, including the teacher. If the social process is *explicitly* directed at the negotiation of alternative understandings and proposals rather than subjected to 'approved' understandings or the understanding of a single person, the learning can entail a sense of ownership rather than mere reproduction. As a group, teacher and learners work towards new understandings; what is learned, being investigated and shaped through

a shared process becomes knowledge that is diverse, dynamic and open to new possibilities.

In the classroom, language input through different media and student output are, most often, channelled through social interaction. In this way, the language made available to be learned is constructed within classroom discourse. In addition to shaping what can be learned, the interpersonal processes of the class also shape how the teaching and learning is actually undertaken. Explicit negotiation about such issues enables exploration and trying out of alternative interpretations as well as uses of the new language and alternative ways of working. The latter can provide opportunities for the individual to extend a repertoire of learning strategies in addition to discovering and refining ways of learning in a group that may have life-long relevance. In this way, participating in negotiation in the language class can contribute towards the disembedding of language learning from the more commonly constrained and relatively predictable discourse of the classroom. It can anticipate and provide the foundations for the student's participation through the new language in *other* discourse contexts beyond the classroom.

Learning a language can be seen as a personal means towards broader cultural engagement and identity. It can entail the taking on of cross-cultural membership and, through negotiation, the classroom culture can be seen as a crucible for this. Just as it is a microcosm of the wider society, a classroom is multicultural in terms of the different voices and perspectives on the new language, on learning and on most things in the world! Language pedagogy that explicitly calls upon these can be a means for the inclusion of, and access to, diverse ways of seeing and meaning. David Stern was one of the few language-teaching theorists and researchers to recognise the importance and potential of what he termed the 'cultural syllabus' for language learning (Stern, 1992), whilst Kramsch has taken this idea further to assert the value of cultural investigation as being an integral part of language learning (Kramsch, 1993). Negotiation can facilitate such endeavours by giving space to the multicultural resources that any classroom group inherently contributes, most obviously in a class of students from different cultural backgrounds. However, if we can also regard the different experiences, knowledges and capabilities of the members of *any* class of students as resources on which to draw explicitly, then this valuing of diversity and alternatives in thinking and ways of working can encourage an openness and flexibility in students' approaches to the learning. And negotiation can contribute to such perceptions and approaches to language learning in particular by repositioning the 'curriculum as cultural conversation' (Onore and Lubetsky, 1992: 259).

Negotiation enables learners to exercise their active agency in learning

Much of the research on language classrooms reveals that many learners are placed in a responsive and seemingly passive role (Chaudron, 1988; van Lier, 1988, Breen, 1998). In such circumstances, learners are positioned like children who may seek to conform to a teacher's expectations and may even underachieve in order to do this. This passive conformity can be misinterpreted by the teacher as a lack of sufficient background knowledge, an unformed learning agenda or a lack of the capacity to participate in decision-making. However, all learners bring prior knowledge and capability to learning and further understanding is sought on the basis of what is already known and not merely given. Negotiation provides a context in which opportunities exist for learners to articulate and, thereby, refine their prior understandings, purposes and intentions as reference points for new learning. All learning also requires intention and decision and, as the humanist psychologists discovered, learners work harder if they can explore and articulate their own ideas, ask their own questions and seek their own answers. Psychologists such as Kelly, Maslow and Vygotsky (see previous section) all identified deeper learning as a gradual quest. Learners need time and space to think things through and to talk, read, write and act themselves into new understandings. They need to confront willingly the risk of the problematic and to identify uncertainties. They also need a sense of continuity and progress and this requires ongoing reflection at appropriate moments. None of these requirements are likely to be attained by a learner without support and feedback from others and negotiating new understandings, uncertainties and evaluative reflections with a group of other people who are sharing the learning experience can clearly provide such support.

Being an active agent of one's own learning in a classroom entails optimising the collective resources of a gathering of people, including a teacher who probably has greater experience of helping people to learn than others in the room. Agency in learning in such circumstances also involves contributing as much as one gains so that a group of learners engaged in shared decision-making can also entail mutual support. From this perspective, negotiation is not strictly a characteristic of what is commonly referred to as 'learner-centred' language pedagogy. Negotiation is *classroom-group* centred, serving a collective teaching-learning process and, thereby, individuals located as members of a group.

In addition to being a stimulus for personal and interactive negotiation for meaning, negotiation is also a means for individual agency in