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Introduction and overview

The focus of the collection

Over recent years, interest in the concepts of 'negotiation' and 'process' in language teaching have come from two main areas of professional debate. On the one hand, research has looked closely at the process of second language acquisition and how interaction may contribute. Studies have examined, for example, how in native/non-native interaction speakers may modify their language in response to requests for clarification to bring about a message comprehensible to the listener. At the same time, a different, though related use of the concept of 'process' and 'negotiation' has emerged in the realm of classroom pedagogy. In this, 'process' has been defined as taking students through various stages in producing language, most notably in the area of academic writing where students are encouraged to collect ideas, draft, redraft, seek feedback and negotiate with peers and with 'the reader' to accomplish a successful text.

Both these avenues of debate have made important contributions to the development of professional knowledge. It is, however, a third, broader, view of the terms 'process' and 'negotiation' which is the focus of this collection. Developing from moves towards communicative language teaching, recent innovations in classroom practice have emphasised the value of collaborative learning, learner-centredness, autonomy and shared decision-making in the classroom. The motivation for developments in this area have come from many sources but a strong element in this is a desire to create forms of classroom interaction which give voice to students in the management of their learning. Through making explicit the typically 'hidden' views of students, the intention is to arrive at more effective, efficient *and* democratic modes of classroom work. In the context of these accounts presented in this book, therefore, negotiation refers to discussion between all members of the classroom to decide how learning and teaching are to be organised.

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Interest in the potential of negotiation in this respect has stimulated work aimed at providing structures which can enable this to happen. Fundamental to the nature of classroom work is the type and content of the syllabus which frames the work teachers and students do together. We have become familiar, for example, with grammatical syllabuses functional syllabuses, lexical syllabuses, and task-based syllabuses. A natural evolution in the desire to establish shared decision-making in the classroom has therefore focused attention on the nature of the syllabus, for it is clear that, in the accomplishment of any educational aim, a structure – however loosely defined – needs to be provided for this to happen. Process syllabuses have therefore evolved as a means of planning, implementing and evaluating negotiation in the classroom, and the decisions to which teachers and students may jointly arrive.

While interest in the concept and potential of negotiation and process syllabuses is high, there is relatively little in the professional literature which documents practical work in this area. Indeed, many commentators have dismissed the concept of a process syllabus as untested and impractical, with scant evidence on which to base such a view. A key aim of this book, then, is to provide a 'landmark' volume which explores the rationale of classroom negotiation and provides accounts of its practicality in diverse contexts.

Organisation

Chapter 1 sets out in detail the meanings and significance of the concept of negotiation, and traces the origins and rationale of the concept into the fields of applied linguistics, educational philosophy and psychology. It also outlines a framework for the application of a process syllabus. Accounts of classroom practice then follow. These are divided in three parts, each of which relates to a different sector of educational practice. Part 1 (Chapters 2 to 7) contains accounts of negotiated work with children in primary and secondary schools, Part 2 (Chapters 8 to 13) provides accounts of work in tertiary education (including universities and language schools), while Part 3 (Chapters 14 to 17) documents work in teacher education. The final chapter in the collection, Chapter 18, draws together some practical implications of classroom negotiation and provides a resource to guide those wishing to introduce negotiation into their own classrooms. Table 0.1 provides an overview of the content of each chapter, indicating in each case the context for negotiated work.

Each of the chapters provides an account in which a teacher has undertaken negotiation with language learners. A distinctive feature of

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Table 0.1 *Overview of negotiated work*

1	*Michael P. Breen and Andrew Littlejohn*	Definition, origins and rationale for negotiation; a framework for process syllabuses
Part 1	**Accounts of practice in primary and secondary schools**	
2	*Anne MacKay, Kaye Oates, Yvonne Haig*	Primary-school pupils learning ESL in Australia
3	*Kari Smith*	Secondary-school students in Israel
4	*Ramon Ribé*	Secondary-school students in Spain
5	*Marianne Nikolov*	Primary-school pupils in Hungary
6	*Pnina Linder*	Secondary-school students in Israel
7	*Isabel Serrano-Sampedro*	Secondary-school students in Spain
Part 2	**Accounts of practice in tertiary education**	
8	*Stefaan Slembrouck*	University students in Belgium
9	*Elaine Martyn*	School of nursing students in Pakistan
10	*Eddie Edmundson and Steve Fitzpatrick*	Language-school students in Brazil
11	*Wendy Newstetter*	Institute of higher education in USA; engineering students studying written English
12	*Margaret Sokolik*	University writing class in USA
13	*Lucy Norris and Susan Spencer*	Pre-departure language course in Indonesia for teachers of a wide range of disciplines
Part 3	**Accounts of practice in teacher education**	
14	*Suzanne Irujo*	Teacher education at a university in USA
15	*Michael McCarthy and Michael Makosch*	Teachers participating in a two-week residential seminar in UK
16	*Roz Ivanič*	MA students at a university in UK
17	*Kate Wolfe-Quintero*	Teaching of writing course at a university in USA
18	*Michael P. Breen and Andrew Littlejohn*	Overview of practical aspects of negotiation

the accounts which the collection provides is the broad range of contexts which are reported. These include those as geographically and culturally diverse as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Pakistan, Spain and the USA, with examples of work in state and private institutions, with small and large classes, and with

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learners of diverse age ranges and educational experience. Some of the writers have negotiated with their students about a single aspect of their curriculum or programme, such as end of course assessment, or overall aims and objectives of the course. Other writers report on shared decision-making about much of their work with their students, including purposes, ways of working, contents and evaluation.

Through the collection as a whole, we learn much about the complexities of introducing negotiation, about apparent achievements as well as failures, successes as well as difficulties. Each of the chapters presents direct experience of negotiation and as such reveals factors such as students' affective response, classroom roles, rights and responsibilities, and the influence of educational cultures. These are factors which underpin all classroom work. The collection aims to broaden our understanding of how negotiation may interact with these factors and thereby provide teachers with starting points for their own initiatives in classroom work.

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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.

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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

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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.

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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

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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.*

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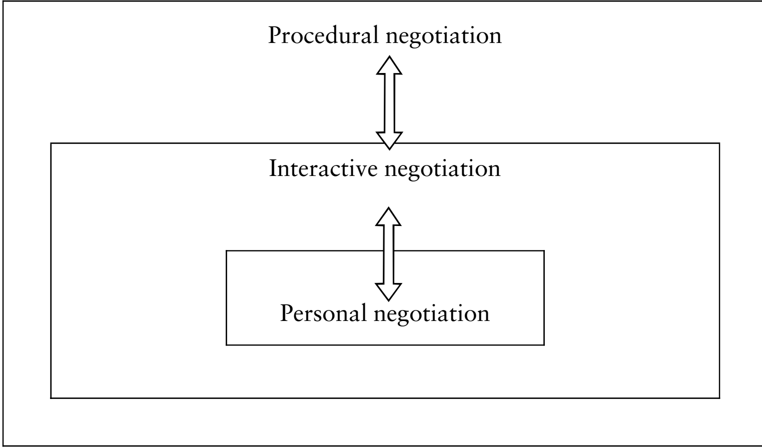

Figure 1.1 Relationship between three kinds of negotiation

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

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