PART I

TEACHER AND STUDENT TALK

1 How do I get my learners to start and stay talking in the second language?

KEY QUESTIONS

- **The Science: Why is it important for learners to talk in the second language?**
- **The Art: How do I encourage learner participation in the second language?**
- **How do I encourage learners to talk in the second language when they work in small groups?**
- **How do I deal with "how do you say X?" types of translation questions?**
- **What should I do if learners don't participate because they are afraid to make mistakes?**
- **How do I incorporate opportunities for learners to use the second language in all parts of my lessons?**

1.1 Voices from the Classroom

Ms. G is a high school Spanish instructor in a large U.S. public school. Her Spanish class of twenty learners meets three times a week for one hour. Ms. G knows that learners only have limited opportunities to hear and use Spanish throughout the week, so she wants to make sure she is using her class time efficiently. When her learners come to class, they take a long time to "warm up" to speaking in Spanish. An experienced Spanish teacher, Ms. G is well aware that when learners speak-among themselves, they mostly use English and only use Spanish when she directly calls on them or is standing next to them. Ms. G wants to include more small-group activities to make her classes more interactive, but she worries that learners don't feel comfortable using the language with their peers. Instead of working through activities in the L2, they often come to ask her for translations. She has told her learners they can only request help if they use Spanish, so "¿Cómo se dice X en español?" ("How do you say X in Spanish?") is now a common refrain in her class. How can Ms. G encourage more learner-to-learner interaction in Spanish? How can she encourage her learners to be creative with their Spanish and less afraid of making

mistakes? Can she encourage them to ask each other how to say something (in Spanish)? What else can she do?

1.2   The Science: What the Research Says

Participation, learner engagement, and involvement are top concerns of teachers in all disciplines. However, for language teachers, encouraging learners to participate, or generate **production** in the second language, is even more critical because production (sometimes also known as **output**, and we will use these terms interchangeably) is a key element of successful language development. In the classroom, successful language production might consist of learners speaking the second language (L2) with the teacher, with their peers, or with anyone else there who speaks the L2, like an assistant teacher or visitor. Production is not just speaking or signing, in the case of signed languages (e.g., American Sign Language, ASL) – it is also learners' informal or formal writing in the L2. Research has shown that learners need a lot of varied opportunities to produce language output through speaking or writing in the L2 in order to learn, and it's not just about getting opportunities – learners actually have to *make use of them*, too.

The importance of production for L2 learning is founded in a long history of research. Merrill Swain became a foundational researcher in this area after noticing that learners in French immersion contexts in Canada who studied French grammar, read French texts, and listened to French being spoken did not develop high levels of French proficiency, even after many years of this sort of immersion. Swain concluded this was because the French learners did not have sufficient opportunities to actually *produce* French in meaningful communicative environments. Studies that have been conducted since Swain's original work have backed this up: learners who produce the L2 on a regular basis learn faster and better. Production is one of the four key ingredients for successful language acquisition, along with access to **input** (the language learners hear, read, or see signed), opportunities for the **negotiation for meaning** (overcoming miscommunications or other language problems through interaction), and to receive and respond to **corrective feedback** (the corrections learners receive from other speakers). In this book, we explain all four of these important elements, starting here in the current chapter with production. We will cover the remaining three (input, negotiation for meaning, and corrective feedback) in more detail in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Quite a few of the older textbooks start with input as the first "ingredient" before production. Indeed, this might seem like a logical place to start, as all language teachers come to learn very quickly that comprehension (of input) precedes production. However, our book is based on the most common questions language teachers have for us – and we find that how to get learners talking in the L2 and staying in the L2 is their number one question. So, that's where we're starting!

BOX 1.1   Four Key Ingredients of Second Language Acquisition

- *Output/Production:* What learners produce (speak or write) in the second language
- *Input:* What learners hear or read in the second language
- *Interactional adjustments/Negotiation for meaning:* Opportunities to overcome comprehension or language production difficulties through interaction
- *Corrective feedback:* Opportunities to receive, provide, and respond to feedback on language production (Note: Corrections can vary in nature, ranging from explicit mentions of grammatical patterns to implicit requests for clarification.)

While learners can produce language (i.e., by talking, signing, or writing) in a classroom when they repeat a dialogue script they have memorized, or parrot something after the teacher, this is not the type of language production we know is most helpful for language learning. The sorts of production that are most helpful include learners having frequent opportunities to (a) use language creatively, (b) discuss language, and (c) encounter and resolve language problems in authentic linguistic situations.

Closely related to the importance of language production is the opportunity for learners to modify their production after receiving corrective feedback or encountering other language problems. When learners have opportunities to adjust or self-correct their own language production, this engages some helpful cognitive processes. For example, they have the opportunity to directly compare what they produced with what they heard their teacher, or a more proficient speaker, produce. This allows them to build mental connections in the L2 that support their language development. To illustrate what we mean, Box 1.2 presents three conversations between language learners and native speakers (more often called "L1 speakers," as we noted in the Preface; we use L1 speakers from here) of English from data in the published literature and one example in Spanish.

BOX 1.2   Exemplar Language Learner: First Language Speaker Conversations

Example 1.1
LEARNER: When it happen?
TEACHER: When did it happen?   ←   Recast (see Chapter 3)
LEARNER: When did it happen?
(from McDonough & Mackey, 2006)

Example 1.2
LEARNER: And I've two-two cup.
TEACHER: You have two cups?   ←   Evidence of misunderstanding
LEARNER: Yeah.   ←   No modification
(from Oliver, 2000)

BOX 1.2 Continued

Example 1.3
LEARNER: What happen for the boat?
TEACHER: What?   ←   Evidence of misunderstanding
LEARNER: What's wrong with the boat? ←   Modified production
(from McDonough, 2005)

Example 1.4

	Spanish	**English**		
Teacher (Regina):	*¿Cómo te llamas?*	What's your name?		
Learner (Alex):	*Te llamas Alex.*	Your name is Alex.		
Teacher (Regina):	¡Me *llamo (gestures) Regina! ¿Cómo* te *(gestures) llamas?*	*My* name is Regina! What's *your* name?	←	Evidence of misunderstanding
Learner (Alex):	*Me* llamo Alex.	*My* name is Alex.	←	Modified production

In Example 1.1 (Box 1.2), after receiving feedback on their production, the learner modified their original utterance by repeating the correct form "When did it happen?" We assume that as this happened, the learner had a chance to compare their production, "When it happen?" to the L1 speaker's production, "When did it happen?" and, as a result, they may have **noticed** the correction from the L1 speaker. Research has connected learners' noticing of corrections and modified production with development in the L2. In research studies of this, learners are sometimes asked what they were thinking about at the time they heard the correction and changed their production. In Example 1.1, the learner might have recalled, "After 'happen' again, I made a little effort to say 'did' because you made me realize you don't understand." This is a fascinating way to understand the process of language development from learners themselves.

In Example 1.2, the learner does not modify their production but instead acknowledges the corrected form "two cups." Whether the learner noticed the correction, or not, is ambiguous. Their response, "yeah," may be evidence they noticed the error or they may just simply be continuing the conversation. Again, asking learners afterward (e.g., after class, or in a reflection assignment at the end of class) what they were thinking shows researchers that sometimes they notice their teacher's corrections, and sometimes they do not.

In Example 1.3, the learner is not able to directly compare their own production, "What happen for the boat?" with the L1 speaker's version of the question, because the L1 speaker only indicates they didn't understand, by saying "What?" However, the learner seems to recognize from the L1 speaker's "What?" response that a misunderstanding has occurred. In order for the L1 speaker to understand, the learner is prompted to self-correct, also referred to as **pushed output** or **modified output**. In this case, the learner's new production is correct, and we can assume

these two speakers were able to continue their conversation. Making errors in production allows learners to receive feedback, compare what they said to the interlocutor's responses, and, perhaps, help them notice gaps in their own knowledge of the new language. We cover different ways learners receive and respond to feedback in more detail in Chapter 3. For now, it's important to realize that errors are important sites for learning, and part of what makes production so helpful.

Another way producing language helps learners become more fluent in their new language is by promoting language **automaticity**, or the everyday routines of language use. Just like driving a car, which at first is made up of many simultaneous tasks that new drivers may struggle to execute fluently, language use becomes more automatic after practice. The more often drivers drive, or learners produce language, the less concentration and mental effort is needed to be accurate and fluent.

1.2.1   Connections to Practice

Supporting and increasing learners' language production is closely tied to supporting learner **engagement** in their learning. This is also talked about in the research as "investment," "active participation," and "emotional commitment to learning," among other terms. Studies have shown that learners with higher levels of engagement are more likely to produce the L2 during activities and, as a result, are more likely to create conditions for themselves that generate high-quality language learning. If learners are not actively participating and engaged in a lesson, they are less likely to produce the L2 and may be less likely to retain any new content in a class where content and language are integrated. This makes sense to teachers – learners who aren't engaged aren't learning.

Often, when learners have minimal-to-no production in the L2, this is related to learners' levels of **willingness to communicate**. In other words, the threshold where learners feel comfortable producing the L2. Willingness to communicate almost always manifests in ways unique to each learner and can change over time and activity (e.g., varying based on who the learner is talking to, their degree of interest in the conversation topic). Studies have shown relationships between learners' personality characteristics, levels and types of motivation, and their anxiety about speaking the L2. We will talk more about how these sorts of individual characteristics affect language learning in Chapters 6 through 10. In classroom settings, learners need to feel supported and comfortable in the learning environment, and need to be encouraged to make mistakes, otherwise they may be too intimidated or find it too stressful to contribute. Also, if not all learners are engaged, some can be "let off the hook," and not be held accountable for their learning. This is a hard issue for teachers to deal with, especially in differentiated classes (classes which are divided by proficiency level or some other learner characteristic; we cover this topic more in Chapter 6). Applying the old adage "You can't please all the people all the time" to the classroom, we like to think about engagement as "It's very difficult to engage an entire class all the time." However, what

we *can* do is create an environment that is positive and includes many opportunities to collaborate in small groups, which usually has a positive impact on learners' willingness to communicate. We will also touch on this in Chapters 4 and 7, during the discussions on ensuring inclusivity of all learners. Content and materials that are aligned with learners' interests may also help improve engagement and encourage participation (see Chapter 8).

BOX 1.3 The Science! Points to Remember

- Speaking or writing in a second language is called output or language production. Producing the second language is a key element for second language development.
- Interactions that push language learners to produce and modify their own language encourage language learning because they make it more likely that learners will notice the differences between their production and first language speakers' production.
- Producing the second language is key to developing automatic, fluent use of that language.
- An engaging, supportive, and positive classroom environment will increase learners' willingness to communicate and thus promote the production of output.

1.3 The Science: What's Missing?

Second language learning and teaching involve many different variables, unique contexts, and situations. This means that it is difficult to say for certain which teaching strategies will always be best for language learning outcomes in every context. No full-time researcher will ever understand a program or classroom like its teacher will. (See Chapter 21 for more information on research conducted by teachers in their own classrooms – often called "action research.") So, it is often up to teachers to use their best judgment and knowledge based on best practices. For example, while we know language production is important for language learning, the research does not stipulate the best method for encouraging production in every type of learning context. Likewise, the science doesn't tell us how many times a learner needs to use a vocabulary word or structure in order to have "learned" it and be able to produce it automatically. Similarly, the research does not tell us the precise ratio of learner-to-teacher interactions versus learner-to-learner interactions necessary for language learning. Instead, the research tells us only that learners *can* and *should* learn from each other (we talk more about peer interaction and learning in Chapter 4). Despite the ongoing research investigations into these questions, teachers need to make it work in classrooms. One way to guide decision-making is to use the science we have reviewed here to inform and follow up on issues that present in classrooms, but adjust as needed for individual learners, contexts, and teaching dilemmas.

Also, there is always variation. So, some learners might perform differently from how the research findings we talk about would suggest. For example, an individual

learner who produces very little L2 might still demonstrate learning but simply need more time to develop their willingness to communicate and move their production from their head to the classroom. Or a child might have specific learning challenges or social-emotional needs that prevent them from producing language easily. In these cases, it is up to the teacher to identify how teaching strategies might be adapted to suit the needs of individual learners. We talk about language learners with specific learning difficulties in depth in Chapter 7.

The tips and tricks below provide some ideas to get teachers started, but we'd advise that teachers see them as jumping-off points. We also give a list of resources for where teachers interested in promoting L2 production in their classrooms can go for more information. Please always keep in mind what we say above – that individual instructors are always best equipped to read over these suggestions and figure out what works best for their own language learners in their teaching context.

1.4 The Art: Research-Based Strategies to Try

1.4.1 The Art of Planning for Output

How to Balance Teacher and Learner Output

In every lesson, unit, or task plan, identify first exactly what the instructor will be doing and what learners will be doing at each point in the lesson. Create a mental flowchart or organizer of the plan and what it will look like for learners throughout the lesson. Visualize the class period (or unit or task) playing out and imagine what the experience will be like for each learner in the room. Throughout the lesson plan, ask the following questions:

• When will learners have the opportunity to produce the L2?
• When will learners be silently listening to the teacher or others?
• How and how often will learners be given the opportunity to demonstrate their learning?

Make sure to strike a balance so that learners have ample opportunities to produce the L2 with the whole class and in small groups and are not spending excessive stretches of time listening to the teacher. Table 1.1 provides an example of an output-based class plan for Ms. G's high school Spanish class. The table shows a model lesson structure that plans for student output. Activities are described in terms of who is saying what, when, and to whom.

By planning this way, Ms. G, our featured teacher in this chapter, can quickly take stock of how much time learners spend listening, versus having opportunities to produce language during each class period or activity sequence.

Choose strategies that ask *all* learners to engage in the discussions and have opportunities for language production. For example, if you plan a whole-class discussion, select one of the strategies in this chapter, such as assigning roles (see below) to ensure all learners are included in opportunities for language production, even if you only solicit a public answer from a few learners.

Table 1.1 Example of student output-based class plan for Ms. G's high school Spanish class

Time	Teacher actions	Learner actions
5 minutes	Whole-class instructions: The instructor describes the next activity where learners will be debating the pros and cons of studying abroad in various Spanish-speaking countries and filling a graphic organizer. Instructions are provided in Spanish.	Learners are listening.
5 minutes	Whole-class modeling: The instructor asks one learner to come to the front of the class to model a few examples and fills in bullets on the graphic organizer.	One learner is producing the L2 during the model. All other learners are listening.
2 minutes	Questions: The instructor asks for questions.	Learners have the opportunity to produce the L2 if they have questions.
15 minutes	The instructor circulates to offer feedback.	Pair interaction: Learners work together to debate pros and cons and fill in the graphic organizer. Learners have opportunities to produce spoken language by taking turns during the activity. They will also produce written language on the graphic organizer. Learners will negotiate for meaning during the activity.

Authentic Materials

Choose content or materials that are aligned with learners' interests in the real world to increase engagement and L2 production. For example, in a high school or secondary class, learners may be more engaged if course content reflects trends and themes of pop culture as shared via blogs, social media posts, or music lyrics. For example, in a unit on "Fashion," learners may enjoy comparing the outfits of celebrities who speak the L2, as shown in the celebrity's Instagram posts, in the tabloid magazines, or clothing "try on" or "haul" videos (both common video genres) from the celebrity's YouTube channel instead of looking at generic pictures of clothing in a textbook. Pick ten to fifteen items from the celebrity outfits and ask learners to pick and discuss which items they would be most likely to wear on different occasions.

1.4.2 The Art of Encouraging Language Production

Polling Learner Interests

Survey learners throughout the year or semester to find out what topics interest them and integrate those topics into your lessons. Keep it relevant for them by using smartphone polling apps if possible. You can ask questions like "What
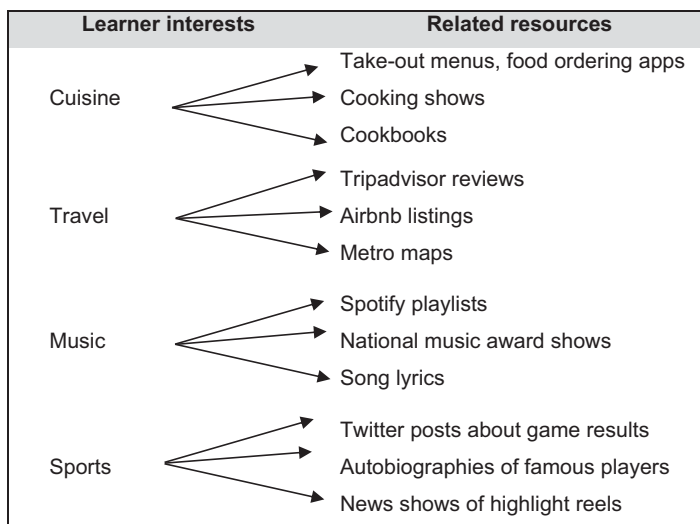
upcoming school or community events are you looking forward to?" and "In which real-life situations can you imagine using the L2 in this year?" Younger or less proficient learners could draw pictures, while older learners could share or write about their preferences or fill in online surveys.

• For younger learners, before a unit on "Family Pets," learners could be asked to draw pictures of the animals they have or the animals they wished they had at home so the teacher can be sure to incorporate their interests into the unit activities. Authentic resources could include pictures, videos, or toys of the specific animals that learners identified.
• For older learners, prior to a unit on "Healthy Routines," a poll could be conducted to gauge the frequency and importance of certain routines and habits in their lives. Authentic resources could include infographics from physical education centers or extracurricular opportunities in local (or international) communities. We will discuss these types of resources in Chapter 18.
• See Figure 1.1 for more ideas on how to create tasks that connect to learners' interests.

Ask 3, Then Me

A typical understanding in the field is that when saying "Ask 3, then me," we mean, *ask three other learners, or consult three other resources, before asking the teacher for help*. Not only does "Ask 3, then me" encourage learners to produce output by forming questions in the L2 and discussing them with peers, it also promotes two important qualities: learner autonomy and learner resilience. See Figure 1.2 for an example.

Learner interests	Related resources
Cuisine	Take-out menus, food ordering apps
	Cooking shows
	Cookbooks
Travel	Tripadvisor reviews
	Airbnb listings
	Metro maps
Music	Spotify playlists
	National music award shows
	Song lyrics
Sports	Twitter posts about game results
	Autobiographies of famous players
	News shows of highlight reels

Figure 1.1 Connecting unit tasks to learner interests. This graphic shows how general learner interest can be explored through authentic resources