CHAPTER 1

Issues in Second Language Acquisition in Relation to Blended Learning

Michael McCarthy

Introduction

This chapter aims to forge links between what is often seen as the more theoretical and/or experimental tradition in applied linguistics and the practical concern of this book: how to combine the best of technology and the best of classroom practice in the environment of Blended Learning (BL) (see also King, Chapter 6, and McCarten and Sandiford, Chapter 12, this volume). The study of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a long-established field that has concerned itself with finding out as much as possible about how second languages are acquired, the underlying processes, the problems, the success or failure of encounters with the target language in natural settings or through pedagogical intervention, within the context of the learner. In the design and implementation of BL, the more we can utilise relevant insights from SLA and other sub-disciplines of applied linguistics, the more likely we are to construct the balance within BL programmes (as between class work and computer-mediated work) on firm foundations.

Within the realm of SLA, there is a considerable body of research into what happens in classrooms, how learners interact with their teachers and peers and how this underpins language learning. These considerations lead us to examine, on the one hand, what the prospects are for recreating the classroom-interactive world in a computer-mediated environment and, on the other, which aspects of classroom interaction are best left in the classroom. Additionally, technology has not only made BL possible in terms of learning platforms and computer-mediated language teaching but it has also enabled us to learn more about how language is used and how learners perform in the target language through different types of language corpora. It is the contention of the present chapter that SLA studies, classroom interaction studies and insights from corpus linguistics can assist us greatly in deciding the balance in BL between classroom activity and computer-mediated work.

In bringing in discussion of corpus linguistics, the present chapter acknowledges both the pros and cons of applying corpus information to language pedagogy (for further discussion, see McCarthy, 1998; O'Keeffe et al., 2007). On the positive side, there has been a transition from the days when corpora were considered to be an obscure pursuit with few practical applications outside of the creation of dictionaries to the present when insights from corpus linguistics are having an ever-increasing influence on the design of teaching materials, from grammar- and vocabulary-learning materials to whole courses, and where learner corpora are more and more being seen as valuable sources of evidence for language development. Written corpora are highly influential and written texts will continue to play a big role in BL programmes as the online world is still dominated by written media (emails, blogs, web pages, chat, social media postings, etc.). However, the greatest transformation in our understanding of and attitudes towards language use has come from spoken corpora, and as communicative language teaching places great emphasis on speaking, the question is: can we incorporate truly interactive speaking into the online element of a BL programme? For this reason, the focus of the present chapter will be more towards the challenges of online speaking and the possibilities and (current) limitations of 'flipping' (moving things typically done in the face-to-face classroom to the online environment) classroom speaking so that it can be done outside of class via online work.

What spoken corpora reveal in terms of the nature of human-to-human interaction both outside and inside classrooms is most relevant to this particular discussion. The greatest challenge is how information extracted from spoken data (both conversational and classroom-originated) can be transferred and transformed from face-to-face contexts to technology-mediated ones, an issue which McCarten and Sandiford (Chapter 12, this volume) address directly. Technology is important in two ways to language learning, since it is not only driving developments in language learning, but also spoken language is in general, at a quickening pace, becoming mediated through technologies such as smartphones, video calling and conferencing, vlogs, and so on. We can still rely on a great deal of e-learning being carried out in the form of writing (online assignments, quizzes, blogs, and so on), but it would be complacent to downplay the growing importance of spoken communication on a global scale, a trend which will only become stronger. The age of the carefully-crafted business letter delivered on good-quality paper is rapidly receding from our collective memory as speaking skills make ever-increasing demands on the language teaching agenda.

As well as insights from corpus linguistics, we now have the benefit of more than two decades of experience of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), a broad term covering any situation in which language-learning activities are carried out on computers, and what happens at the human-machine interface (see Chambers, 2010, and the articles in Thorne and Payne, 2005, respectively). Despite technological limitations, CALL practitioners were interested from early days in recreating human interaction as far as possible via student-computer activity (Fischer, 2008). Although early CALL may now appear impoverished in terms of its screen displays, speed and restricted range of activities, the backroom technologies that facilitated it have since progressed in leaps and bounds. The introduction of tablets, smartphones and their associated apps has transformed the potential for machine-based, mobile language learning, creating new types of learning experiences in addition to transferring existing ones to mobile devices (see Patten et al., 2006; Mueller et al., 2012; Dudeney and Hockly, Chapter 13, this volume). CALL has also joined forces with corpus linguistics in the development of data-driven learning (DDL), i.e., activities where learners are directly exposed to corpus material, through which inductive learning (where learners are

presented with particular examples and asked to make rules or generalisations about usage) is fostered.

DDL, like other technology-based approaches to language teaching, has its advantages and disadvantages (Allan, 2006; Boulton, 2009). Nonetheless, it is still relevant to certain domains of BL in terms of the types of acquisition it promotes or underpins and will need to be considered as a potential feature of the 'flipped' classroom (the system of choices whereby activities traditionally done in classrooms are 'flipped' or transferred to the domain of homework and self-study, and vice versa – see Johnson and Marsh, Chapter 4, this volume). In this case, broadly speaking, DDL presents a new way of studying (i.e., reading and interpreting computer-generated concordances) and an increased awareness of how language works in real contexts. However, at the very least, DDL demands considerable training and practice in a novel way of thinking about language before students can work comfortably and independently with it. Success in DDL is often related to student level, with higher-level and academically-oriented students tending to benefit most (e.g., Poole, 2012).

We have, therefore, a potential triangulation of evidence with which to inform decisions about BL (see Figure 1.1).

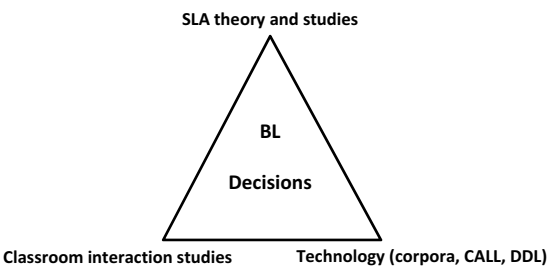

Figure 1.1 Triangle of Evidence to Inform Decisions about Blended Learning

At one point of the triangle we have a range of SLA research and theories; at another we have classroom interaction studies, which share some common ground with mainstream SLA but which rest on their own paradigms, often rooted in discourse analysis (the study of language beyond the sentence-level) and conversation analysis (the study of how conversations develop, how speakers take turns, and so on). The third point of the triangle is what we know about spoken interaction both outside and inside classrooms from corpus analysis and technology-mediated language learning (e.g., CALL and DDL). Trading these three points off against one another will, it is hoped, give us a clearer picture of what the criteria for best practice in BL might look like.

Approaches to SLA in Relation to BL

Late-twentieth century SLA researchers were often wedded to the belief that SLA should be a natural-scientific endeavour, with rigorous laboratory-style experimentation, control of variables, pre-testing and post-testing and rational interpretation of empirical data based on objective statistical analysis (for further discussion, see the special issue of the journal *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 1997, 19, (2). Many such studies reported on the incremental acquisition of grammatical morphemes (e.g., verb-tenses, articles) (Pica, 1983; Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991) and

vocabulary growth (Coady and Huckin, 1997; Laufer, 1998; Milton, 2009, 2010), two areas considered to be (readily) measurable and at the core of SLA. Additional factors that have come under scrutiny include:

- whether instruction is explicitly or only implicitly focused on language forms (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2002);
- the efficacy of corrective feedback (what the teacher or the machine can give back to students in response to their efforts) (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Russell, 2009);
- attention and 'noticing' as a first step to acquisition (Schmidt, 1990, 1993);
- cross-linguistic transfer effects (Sharwood Smith and Kellerman, 1986);
- how L1 and L2 systems interrelate (Cook, 2008).

All of these go hand in hand with factors affecting the design and balance of BL programmes and what can be done outside of classrooms or inside them and what can be 'flipped' from one to the other.

As well as the question of whether fixed orders of acquisition of grammatical morphemes are a reality, scholars have attempted to ascertain whether there is a relationship between learning fixed formulaic expressions and later emergence of rule systems (see the discussion in Ellis and Shintani, 2013: 63ff.). However, the sequence of acquisition of grammatical morphemes is complex with a number of factors influencing the sequence, e.g., frequency of input and exposure to the target morphemes, semantic complexity and L1 influences (Goldschneider and DeKeyser, 2002). Thornbury (Chapter 2, this volume) urges considerable caution in this matter, bringing to bear evidence that acquisition need not be linear and can be quite varied, sometimes going backward as well as forward. By their nature, individual differences make it difficult/risky to make generalisations, although it may become apparent through careful analysis that there might be some suggestive trends which could be more reliably taken advantage of (Cook, 2008). Concrete evidence of a transition from the learning of fixed formulae to rule formation may be even more elusive.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNER DIFFERENCES

Individual differences are of great relevance to BL and have both positive and negative implications for how BL proceeds. On the positive side, as we have noted, individuals can do things successfully in their own way and own time outside of the collective pressures of the face-to-face classroom. However, individual differences among learners are numerous, and may include:

- age and gender;
- learning styles and strategic abilities (Dörnyei, 2006), including learning techniques and communicative strategies such as guessing, requesting clarification, avoidance of the use of what are perceived as difficult forms;
- emotional factors such as motivation, stress and anxiety;
- a sense of personal identity (for a detailed survey of these factors, see Ehrman et al., 2003).

These factors may present overwhelming obstacles to the designer of the out-of-class elements of a BL programme, in that computer-mediated activity by an individual working without a teacher cannot be monitored and responded to with the same sensitivity as would be second nature to the good, caring classroom practitioner, even though

machine-based adaptive intelligent tutoring systems designed to maximise individual feedback will undoubtedly develop and be refined in the future (Wang and Liao, 2011; San Pedro and Baker, Chapter 14, this volume).

The literature on individual differences frequently stresses learning strategies and learning styles and the superiority of interlocked and targeted strategies. Learning strategies, it is held, can be taught, whether directly and separately or embedded in other language learning activities. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), who give a most detailed account of learning strategies and strategy training, highlight the importance of teachers and students interacting, with teachers providing scaffolding for the successful development of strategies. This suggests that the most successful strategy training will take place in face-to-face classrooms but it does not exclude the potential for well-constructed strategy training programmes for computer-mediated use (Kohler, 2002). The importance of consideration of the individual learner working outside of the class and his or her strengths and weaknesses is reflected in the fact that even relatively closed computer-mediated exercises may fall foul of lack of motivation, lack of preparedness, poorly developed learning strategies and lack of understanding of the learning opportunities provided by the technology on the part of the learner.

THE CONCEPT OF 'NOTICING'

One area clearly of relevance to the world of the student working either in class or alone, online, out of class with no 'live' or face-to-face encounters with a teacher, or in computer-mediated interaction with peers, is the value of 'noticing' (observing important features and consciously paying attention to the forms and meanings of the language one is working with) and attention in enhancing language acquisition. The idea of noticing is usually discussed within the more general umbrella of the role of consciousness in language learning and its related notions of explicit versus implicit knowledge. Mid-twentieth-century face-to-face classrooms typically cast the teacher in the role of transmitter of explicit knowledge about grammatical rules and the meanings and uses of language forms. Latter twentieth-century methodologies such as communicative teaching via 'notional-functional' (an emphasis on meaning and communicative function) or task-based pedagogy often played down the role of such conscious attention to language input and production, with the assumption that a good deal of learning would simply occur implicitly, though in reality, most common-sense teaching never adhered to one extreme or the other. Thornbury, in Chapter 2 of this volume, sees potential for software development to enhance the potential for noticing in computer-mediated environments where the student cannot rely on a teacher to direct and guide the noticing activity.

Recent decades have seen a reassessment of explicit focus on language and the advocacy of consciousness-raising activities in the classroom alongside more implicit types of syllabuses. Ellis (1993) argues for such a combination and sees the learner's task as noticing the gap between formal features of the language and those they use themselves. In Schmidt's (1990; 1993) view of consciousness, a distinction is drawn between 'intentionality' (put simply, the learner's desires/aims to find out about the target language whether inside or outside of the class) and 'incidental learning', which may occur without intent. What the learner notices in the input becomes the 'intake', which is the raw material upon which the acquisition processes operate. Schmidt himself famously kept a journal of what he noticed while learning Brazilian Portuguese, and what he noticed correlated well with what could be shown as that which he had learnt. But noticing also requires attention in second language learning, not just spotting things randomly, and what can be noticed depends on the nature and amount of input the learner experiences. What is noticed is then taken in to become part of hypothesis formation and induction.

Noticing is another of those activities which would seem to function best when assisted and scaffolded by good teachers in conventional classrooms helping learners towards learning opportunities. Walsh (2006: 30) sees 'quality interaction' in the classroom as enhancing opportunities for noticing and suggests that the richest moments for noticing are when the teacher is directing the class in what he terms 'skills and systems mode' (Ibid.: 74), where there is a direct focus on target language forms (see below).

THE LEARNER'S SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Criticism of natural-science-driven, positivist approaches to SLA has come from scholars who view SLA as a humanistic discipline, one in which the learner and the processes of acquisition cannot and should not be detached from the social and cultural context. This sociocultural approach to SLA has been led by scholars such as Lantolf, Appel and Thorne (Lantolf and Appel, 1994; Lantolf, 2006; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Lantolf and Poehner, 2014) and goes hand in hand with theories of language socialisation (Duff and Hornberger, 2008). In these paradigms, the language learner cannot be perceived and treated as a laboratory subject but is a social being who builds upon existing knowledge and thrives under guidance and scaffolding during the experience of acquiring a language as a social and cultural resource. What we need a fuller understanding of is the nature of the computer-mediated world as a social and cultural environment and how its sociocultural practices may differ from (but not necessarily be inferior to) the sociocultural practices of the conventional face-to-face world.

The importance of the learner's sense of social and cultural identity and the role of classrooms in nurturing that sense are not to be underestimated. That humans are defined by a single identity has been challenged in the social sciences, with identity increasingly seen as made of multiple aspects which are flexible, dynamic and continuously reconstructed through interaction. National and ethnic identities are proposed as existing alongside identities such as those that can be triggered by language use (Spolsky, 1999: 181). Additionally, it is interesting to observe whether individuals feel comfortable with particular group-identities or prefer to distance themselves from them, a question relevant to classroom communities, online communities and wider social communities (Norton, 2000; Toohey, 2000; Maybin, 2006; Block, 2007). Motivation may also be affected by sense of self, a preoccupation addressed in the papers in Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009). Thus, activities such as noticing and giving attention cannot be seen as taking place in a mental space divorced from the sociocultural context of the learner, from the situations in which language is mediated within and without classrooms, from the scaffolding provided by teachers and peers and from the very sense of self and the aspirational self that the learner possesses. These values need to be retained in good language pedagogy and are probably best nurtured in the face-to-face classroom or at least in the context of online social networking among teachers and learners, rather than in the isolated domain of the student working alone on a task that merely gives machine-driven feedback.

To conclude this discussion of some of the preoccupations of SLA, we might say that what we know about learners is that they are complex beings who bring to the language learning task a mixture of factors, some relating to knowledge, skills and abilities and some related to personal, social, cultural and emotive aspects. Classrooms and student communities possess accumulated contexts and identities, manifested in an ability to deal with issues face-to-face, through sensitive, real-time adjustments to the responses and reactions of teachers and peers (see Thornbury, Chapter 2, this volume, for further discussion).

SLA in Relation to Computer-mediated Language Learning

Process or Product?

SLA scholars are concerned with how people acquire second languages and how best we can understand the underlying processes of language acquisition (VanPatten and Benati, 2010: 2). While not everything that falls within the domain of SLA may be relevant to the concerns of BL, issues such as typical patterns of grammatical acquisition, rates of vocabulary growth, the role of noticing in language learning and the role of feedback influence the choice of the balance of activity between the classroom and out of class computer-mediated study and what should and should not be 'flipped' in flipped classrooms.

We might begin by looking at the fundamental question of what it is that SLA quantitative experiments or qualitative studies observe. Is it the processes of acquisition or only the products? And how does one get from conscious processes to unconscious ones that may occur during acquisition? Clearly, the more we can understand processes, the better we can inform our decisions as regards which processes can be recreated in the online world. Some commonly used ways of attempting to access process include classroom observation protocols (where a researcher observes a class, perhaps with a checklist of things to record), concurrent think-aloud protocols (where learners speak aloud the thoughts going through their minds as they grapple with the language), interrupting students during tasks to find out what they are doing or thinking and retrospective verbal reports after task completion (Færch and Kasper, 1987). Yet such self-reporting can be criticised as separating what should really be considered as unified: thinking about and acting in a second language may be part of a unitary process (as Seedhouse et al., in Chapter 10, this volume, may well lead us to conclude). For example, there is considerable debate over whether concurrent thinking aloud during tasks can actually change mental processes rather than merely articulate them (Bowles, 2010). Furthermore, in sociocultural approaches to SLA (which stress the integration of social and cultural elements in learning), 'private speech' (speaking aloud to oneself to regulate one's own thoughts and actions) and 'inner speech' ('thinking' language rather than pronouncing it), as discussed by de Guerrero (2005) and Lantolf and Thorne (2006: Chapter 4), are considered no less important than 'social speech' (speech directed at others). Private speech data provide a window on thought processes that think-aloud language directed at someone else may complicate and can provide information concerning learners' attention to a task both in experimental settings and in classrooms. Private speech is thus seen as a crucial element in the process whereby features of the target language are internalised (Ohta, 2001: Chapter 2; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Lee, 2008). But can BL practice capitalise upon such insights and, by the same token, can data from BL environments contribute new insights to our understanding of acquisition processes inherent in different kinds of language-learning experiences?

Using Technology to 'Uncover' the Processes of SLA

The various types of thinking aloud (whether directed at someone else or private) can be observed both in the verbal world of the classroom but also in a proxy form in synchronous computer-mediated chat (SCMC, which are real-time exchanges of online chat activities) and in the writing of learner journals and blogs. Furthermore, these elements might offer invaluable evidence of self-regulated behaviour in the computer-mediated elements of the flipped classroom. Unlike traditional classroom-observation protocols, these provide a comprehensive and permanent record of activity.

Another avenue to potentially access learning processes is via the capability of learning platforms to monitor in real time and in fine detail what students do when working with

materials (Chun, 2013; Collentine, 2013). A complete record can be had of how long students spend on each item in an exercise or task, how many times they repeat it, how often they get things right or wrong, how long they devote to each study session and so on, all of which may shed light on ongoing, underlying processes during learning activity. However, interpretation of such data must proceed with care. Weinberg (2007), for example, shows that students spending least time on activities are not necessarily the lowest achievers and, vice versa, those dedicating most time are not necessarily high achievers. Nonetheless, such information can provide extra insight that might be difficult or impossible to obtain through face-to-face classroom observation or conventional experimental protocols. The time-stamped evidence of activity on the computer or mobile device may not be sufficient in itself to elucidate the processes of acquisition but it is a robust addition to other available instruments for observing learners at work, grappling with the language and recording learning outcomes.

Time-stamped evidence of activity will, however, tell us little about affective factors (factors to do with feelings and emotions), learning styles and motivation (Barrs, 2010; Lai and Gu, 2011), but it may provide indications of points where motivation and concentration have possibly flagged or increased and information about which activities seem to have presented greatest difficulty. Difficulty of processing is a key topic in SLA and is considered to be among the factors which hinder acquisition (see Han, 2004: 116–118). Thus, indications of possible difficulty provided by time-stamped evidence of numerous students working online may point to an underlying issue in the teaching materials that will need further investigation. If difficulties persist, then the input probably needs some kind of remedial attention, or 'input enhancement' (modifying the material to make it more accessible), an important concept in SLA (Sharwood Smith, 1993; Chapelle, 1998). Such enhancement might involve adding greater emphasis to target items or increased practice material, but, once again, decisions should not be taken on the evidence of computer-mediated work only. Hwu (2004), who offers practical examples of technology-based input enhancement in video materials, states the importance of taking into account learner difficulty as observed in the face-to-face classroom too. One of the advantages of BL is that it offers researchers two different but complementary windows through which to observe learning.

Online work also offers the possibility of gathering evidence from the broader social networking that often accompanies it, including SCMC data, learner journals, blogs and vlogs, text messages, emails, chat rooms and forums. Students reluctant to offer up their observations, feelings and opinions in class or in an experimental setting may well feel less inhibited in the online world (though see Stevenson and Liu, 2010, for a discussion of the pluses and minuses of social networking in online language learning). SCMC data, in particular, offer the possibility of observing input-output loops as students negotiate meaning and solve problems during task activity and modify their own output, offering a potential window on real-time learning processes (Blake, 2000; Collentine, 2013).

LIMITATIONS OF USING TECHNOLOGY TO REVEAL PROCESSES IN SLA

A further difficulty in observing SLA processes in computer-mediated environments is the fact that CALL practitioners have pointed out the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between technological literacy and the ability to maximise the use of technology for learning and positive learning outcomes (Kirkwood, 2004, 2006; Kirkwood and Price, 2005). There is evidence at the time of writing that, when given the choice, learners utilise technology for a limited range of language-learning activities, such as listening, writing and vocabulary exercises (Stevenson and Liu, 2010; Çelik et al.,2012) and that they under-use or prefer not to use at all some capabilities of online learning and participation (Hampel

and Pleines, 2013), though this may change in the future as the population becomes more adept and at ease with technology.

The basic problem, therefore, would seem to be that technological capabilities may assist us in measuring the amount of time and effort spent on learning activities and the success or otherwise in completing activities but may yet not give us enough insight into SLA processes intrinsic in computer-mediated language-learning activity, especially in relation to affective, strategic and motivational factors and attitudes towards technology-based learning. What data we can obtain with relative ease may not provide a full picture in relation to language learning activities beyond the basic ones of grammar and vocabulary, especially in areas such as the development of interactional competence (see Walsh, Chapter 3, this volume) or rhetorical (above-sentence-level) skills in writing. The combination of technology-based data and other, more conventional types of data and observation offered by BL programmes may, nonetheless, provide richer insight than any one type of data alone.

Classroom Interaction and Spoken Corpora

Ever since the early days of the development of classroom discourse analysis (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), scholars have attempted to tease out the relationship between the discourse of teachers and learners and what, if anything, is being learnt and how. Although learners may well practise and learn a great deal through written work (whether conventionally on paper or computer-mediated), for most school-based learners in the world, what is said in the classroom remains central to the learning experience. By examining classroom transcripts, researchers have attempted to gauge the degree to which language learning in the classroom can represent an authentic encounter with the language of the world outside and to what extent teacher-student dialogue and student-student dialogue promote language acquisition. Studies have often focused on the degree to which negotiation for meaning in student-student tasks promotes acquisition (Wong-Fillmore, 1982, 1985; Johnson, 1995). It is clear that learners can assist one another in the process of language development (e.g., Ohta 2001: 124), even though lower-level learners may remain particularly dependent upon teachers before they can efficiently and effectively carry out peer-to-peer tasks (Ibid.: 269).

Modes of Interaction within the Second Language Classroom

The question of how teachers manage and run their classes and how that affects and promotes learning is a crucial one (Johnson, 1995; Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Seedhouse, 2004; Walsh, 2006, 2011 and Chapter 3, this volume). Effective teachers make moment-by-moment decisions about what is happening and what should happen in classes and switch, with sensitivity and aplomb, from one mode of interaction with their students to another, back and forth in a carefully choreographed performance designed both to manage with efficiency and efficacy the available learning time and to spot and exploit learning opportunities. Thornbury (Chapter 2, this volume) sees the teacher as providing just the right amount of support on a 'just in time' basis.

Walsh (2006), basing his study on a corpus of some 100,000 words of transcribed EFL classroom interactions, sees the different strategic behaviours of teachers as falling into four distinct 'modes' of interaction, whose purpose is to align language use with pedagogical goals to optimise teaching and learning (see also Seedhouse, 1994; Evison, 2013). Sometimes, the teacher will choose to engage in managing and organising the classroom, other times the focus is on the materials and their exploitation, other times the teacher may

choose to focus on the system of the target language itself, its rules and ways of using them, and yet other times the teacher will encourage the students in genuine interaction. In this last mode, students can express themselves and their experiences and practise fluent production within the context of the classroom rather than in the outside world, where opportunities for interaction in the target language may be rare. The good teacher is also constantly monitoring the overall classroom situation and takes action to ensure that it creates an enjoyable and motivating environment (Dörnyei, 2007).

The movements from one classroom mode to another are made moment-by-moment and are principally controlled by the teacher; there is not necessarily a pre-ordained script and fluidity is all. This fluidity of interaction is best observed through discourse analyses (looking for patterns and structure in the interaction) and/or conversational analyses (focusing on the turn-by-turn unfolding of the interaction) of classroom transcripts, wherein classroom language is seen, like non-classroom conversations, to unfold turn-by-turn between speakers and listeners, where the construction of the discourse manifests as a joint activity, is goal-oriented and is organised on the content and interpersonal plains simultaneously. In such 'live' interactions, social and cultural contexts are both created and reinforced, jointly, by all the participants, sharing common goals.

COMPARISON OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION MODES WITH GENERAL INTERACTION

Insights from the analysis of classroom interaction share common ground with insights from general conversational studies, and indeed Markee (2008) has argued that conversation analysis techniques are key to understanding how linguistic competence and interactional competence emerge in second language classrooms. In adding the power of large-scale corpus data to the analysis of talk, spoken corpus studies reveal time after time the hard work that interactants engage in, the way conversational flow is created and maintained and how relationships among speakers are forged and reinforced to create successful communication.

Corpus studies reveal how speakers construct their turns to acknowledge and link them with previous speakers' turns (Tao, 2003; McCarthy, 2010), how speakers signal and project assumed shared worlds (O'Keeffe, 2006; Evison et al., 2007), how they draw on a repertoire of response tokens that simultaneously acknowledge and engage socially and emotionally with the contributions of other speakers (McCarthy, 2003; O'Keeffe and Adolphs, 2008), how they co-construct utterances in an apparently seamless way (Clancy and McCarthy, 2014), how discourse markers and other common, small words organise talk into coherent and meaningful segments (Aijmer, 2002), and so on. In casual conversations, the goals may be purely social; in classrooms, the goals are pedagogically focused but are often achieved more readily if participants put one another at their ease. Recreating in the computer-mediated world the conditions under which human beings typically converse in their daily lives is clearly a serious challenge to educators, especially where the machine is the 'listener/recipient'.

CAN 'MODE-SWITCHING' BE EXPLOITED ONLINE?

It is not easy to see at a glance how the out-of-class elements of language learning in BL can recreate such moment-by-moment responsiveness to the immediate context, especially that which is triggered through the teacher's experienced antenna, telling him/her to shift the focus to another mode, or else to persist within a mode, or to spot and exploit a golden learning opportunity and generally to promote an enjoyable experience. In this respect, it is perhaps over-simplistic to say that managerial, materials and systems and skills modes