



**COMMUNICATION, DISCOURSE, INTERACTION
IN LANGUAGE CLASSES**

by

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SUMMARY

This investigation consists in examining discourse interaction in French Year 8 classes. Our observations of a total of twelve classes in four South Australian schools are placed within the broader perspective of the study of the teaching process and classroom interaction.

"Interaction" has become a catchphrase for the last two decades, associated with the promotion of communicative practice in L2 classrooms. However, classroom researchers who have strictly adhered to a discourse analyst approach have focussed upon the linguistic coding rather than upon the whole of the communicative behaviour.

The central issue of how L2 learning is enhanced in classroom interaction needs to be examined in the light of the following assumptions. First, communicative behaviour is organised at multiple levels simultaneously. Second, interaction in L2 classes requires an analysis of all available aspects of behaviour in order to be understood. Third, the interactive significance of actions can only be understood and analysed in context. Our task is to clarify these assumptions by developing methodological tools in order to unravel the multiple threads of discourse. For this, we use the concept of context, which includes the local discourse context, together with other contextual elements: physical cues and interpersonal setting.

The research methodology involves a transcription of the videorecorded data based on the identification of discourse frameworks. Incorporated into the transcription is a codification of "non-verbal" features. Particular attention is paid to gestures, looks, laughter, movements which are indicative of shifts between the purely didactic and the more social nature of discourse.

The insights gained from these representations have a very direct relevance to teachers. Two practical applications which focus on interactive performance, as a specific feature of L2 learning, are documented.

While it may be that nothing much is found that is not already known, one of the major value of the study is that it is "home grown", and as such it indicates current trends in French learning and teaching in the Australian context. It also reassesses the distinctive contribution of classroom-based research for ascertaining what works best for learning a language at a particular stage.



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