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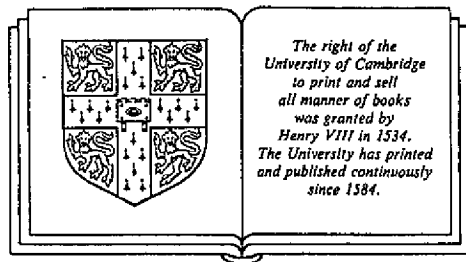
Focus on the Language Classroom:

An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

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9 Receptivity: the issues involved

In this chapter we shall be looking at classroom language learning and outlining the various aspects of it that might engage either receptivity or defensiveness on the part of the learners. In the next chapter, we will then turn to the relevant research to see how what we are calling 'receptivity' has been studied, and with what results so far.

Here we shall briefly review a number of such background issues to language learning receptivity, before going into detail on eight more issues of particular importance from the perspectives of classroom research.

9.1 Openness to what?

If receptivity means openness, for our purposes, then the next question must be: openness to what? 'Openness to the new language' is the obvious answer, but the situation is not quite that simple. For instance, learning a new language implies learning about another culture, another way of life. If that new way of life is itself attractive to you in some way, then it may be easier to cope with the moments when language learning seems impossibly slow, or impossibly demanding of concentrated effort. This issue is related to studies on 'integrative motivation' – the desire of the language learner to affiliate in some way with the speakers of the target language (see, for example, Gardner and Lambert 1972; Gardner 1979).

For this reason, receptivity to the target language itself is our first background issue – whether you find the language you are supposed to be learning attractive or ugly to listen to, for example. Along the same lines, some people may find a language elegantly systematic, while others are put off by what they see only as complicated rules.

Another background issue, mentioned above, is receptivity to the people and culture a new language represents. We know that people feel they can judge others by the way they speak, and that this principle holds true across languages, so that if there are prejudices between groups these can quite easily be demonstrated. To take but one example, in a Canadian study (Lambert *et al.* 1960), speakers of English revealed their stereotypes of French-speaking Canadians by judging the personality

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behind tape-recorded voices speaking either English or French. The French voices got rated as less intelligent, less trustworthy, and so on, than the English ones, although the French and English recordings were made by the same bilingual speakers using the two different languages. (This procedure is called the 'matched guise technique' and has been widely used in sociolinguistic research.) Since the same person was heard, though speaking two different languages, any differences in judgement would have to be attributed to the language being used and its associations in the minds of the people who judged the recordings. The associations are interesting, of course, because they may be far more important than the aesthetic aspects of languages. It is not that French, in itself, sounds less 'intelligent', but that the English-speaking Canadians in the study associated French with people they regarded as less intelligent, and generalised this impression to other speakers of Canadian French. This same sort of pattern has been found in a wide variety of studies encompassing several countries and language groups. (See for example, Lambert, Anisfeld, and Yeni-Komshian 1965; Williams 1973a, 1973b; Galvan, Pierce and Underwood 1976; Ryan and Giles 1982.)

This question of language attitudes as a background issue has major implications for language teaching policy. Should English, for example, be given a major place on a curriculum because of its importance as a world language, even where it is remembered as the language of colonial oppression? The issue also has implications for materials design: can materials be designed in a 'culturally neutral' way, or so that they reflect the native culture of the learners, rather than that of the target language's native speakers? This is not an issue that has been raised by classroom research, and is probably not one that is best investigated by the standard classroom research procedures, but it does have an impact on learners' receptivity to the target language.

Another such background issue is receptivity to the idea of being associated with the other non-native speakers of the new language – your own compatriots perhaps. In many places the association is likely to be positive, where, for example, learners may wish to learn English because it will give them a better chance of joining their compatriots who have interesting and lucrative careers in government. In others it may be negative, where compatriots who have learned the language in question are seen as in some sense disloyal, perhaps even as supporters of an alternative form of government.

As teachers, we sometimes tend to think that our learners really have nothing better to do with their lives than to be our students. And yet we all know that sometimes learners find concentrating difficult, not because there is something drastically wrong with what is happening in the lesson, but because their attention is drawn by other priorities. They are

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not receptive to what we, as teachers, are offering because they have other, more pressing things on their minds. This problem is probably familiar to anyone who has taught survival language skills to otherwise highly motivated immigrant adults in classes scheduled after their regular working day. Perhaps the learners have only just arrived in the area and are still having major accommodation problems. They may be worried about their health, or their financial security. Perhaps they do not have adequate childcare and must either bring their children to class or stay at home. For whatever reasons, their receptivity may be affected by factors that in themselves have little or nothing to do with whatever happens in the language classroom.

Having briefly introduced some background issues, we can now move on to those aspects of receptivity that are most directly related to classroom experiences. Our discussion throughout the rest of this chapter is more speculative than research-based, but we hope the issues raised will be thought-provoking in terms of how they may relate to language teaching and learning, and how they might be explored through the various approaches to classroom research.

9.2 Receptivity to the teacher as a person

If you ask people about the languages they have learned, then you are likely to arouse memories of particular teachers – perhaps of the teacher who first captured their enthusiasm, or of the teacher who effectively killed it off. Even young children seem to identify school subjects strongly with the teachers who teach them, and sometimes find it very difficult to like a subject if they do not like the person who teaches the class. It would seem important and helpful, to most people, to be able to get on well with their teacher, to be open to the sort of person that he or she is. Although some teachers may infect practically all their learners with their own enthusiasm, other teachers may succeed in ruining the experience for practically all theirs. The situation is further complicated by the possibility that learners may disagree about their teacher, even within a given class, so that some learners feel unable to get on with a teacher who is clearly very well liked by other learners in the same class.

9.3 Receptivity to fellow learners

Yet another background issue, on a much more modest scale perhaps, concerns receptivity to the notion of being associated with your fellow learners. Do you want to be seen as someone who is interested in learning foreign languages, and who likes the company of people who like learning foreign languages? Among English school children, this question

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can be a gender issue, with languages typically seen as girls' subjects. In the United States the study of certain languages (such as French) has at times been perceived as a girls' subject, thus sometimes making it difficult for boys to allow themselves to look interested. This is a problem well worth the attention of classroom researchers, who might investigate how such prejudices are maintained, or observe the effect of a positive attempt to fight the prejudices using the action research paradigm.

The question of receptivity to one's fellow learners has immediate pedagogical implications for classroom interaction, particularly in teachers' efforts to structure group-work tasks. Some learners may just not be open at all to the experience of working with other members of the same class. This is likely to be especially important in language work wherever the emphasis is on learning by interacting in small groups, with other learners and without the teacher's constant attention. Beyond the very real possibility of simple personality clashes, however, there may also be all sorts of inter-ethnic or political prejudices that threaten learners' receptivity to each other as people.

There is also the further possibility that learners may not wish to work with each other because, for example, the more proficient may feel they have nothing to gain from interacting with the less proficient, or the less proficient may feel demoralised by the superior performance of the others. In such cases a lot may depend on just how the teacher manages the class – our next point.

A related concern has to do with the impact of other learners themselves. Put negatively, this amounts to the potentially influential role of peer pressure in classroom language learning. Gardner (1979) conducted a survey in which teachers of Native American children were asked about their learners' motivation levels. The teachers judged the children's motivation to speak English as starting high in the first and second grades, and then dropping precipitously in subsequent years until it hit a low point in fifth to seventh grade. At the same time, negative peer pressure (not to use English) was judged the lowest in the early grades with a sharp increase in the fifth to the seventh grades. In other words, Gardner feels there is a relationship between peer pressure to avoid using the target language and the learners' motivation levels (as perceived by the teachers).

9.4 Receptivity to the teacher's way of teaching

Receptivity to the teacher's way of teaching (including the teaching method, of course, but that is too narrow a term here) is probably more important than receptivity to fellow learners' ways of learning. At least we suspect this is the case in many of the world's language classrooms,

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where the teacher is such a dominant figure and the learners rarely get much of a chance to develop an individual approach. (However, the extent to which learners in such classes do remain individuals should not be underestimated.) A teacher may be liked as a person, and well respected as a professional, and yet not teach in a way that suits everybody in the class, to the extent that some learners may find that teacher quite useless to them.

9.5 Receptivity to course content

Language courses are not only about language. Quite apart from the cultural content we have already mentioned, there has to be something to talk about, even in the most mechanical of sentence pattern practices. Very often this carrier topic is not intrinsically interesting to learners. (The term 'carrier topic' is used, as we noted in section 7.3, because the topic carries the language items being practised.) There comes a point when the learners no longer wish to talk about the fictitious Robinson family that lives nowhere in particular, with a stupid dog and two boring children.

More worrisome, courses whose content has been specially designed to be relevant to learners' academic, social, or occupational needs may not lead learners to feel receptive because 'relevance' itself is not necessarily compelling. If learners have just had a week of biology as university students, they may not want their English lessons to carry on with yet more of the same, however relevant it is, and however useful it ought to be in helping them cope with the next week's work in biology. So even the most well-intentioned attempt at ensuring receptivity, through matching content to learners' ostensible needs, may backfire.

Many teachers have also experienced the difficulties that arise when their approach to organising course content does not match with the learners' expectations as to what a language course should involve. For instance, learners from traditional educational systems sometimes react negatively to attempts to teach communicatively, or to organise a situational or functional syllabus, if they feel that grammar is the proper focus for a language course and everything else is just wasting time or, perhaps more positively, having fun.

9.6 Receptivity to teaching materials

Sometimes, even if everything else seems favourable, learners can 'switch off' because they do not like the way the content of their course is presented in the teaching materials. The textbook may perhaps be dull to

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look at, with crowded pages and very few illustrations to catch the eye. Or learners may be offended by the illustrative style used in textbooks. In an experimental study, for example, Pearson (1983) found that learners from various cultures reacted very differently when faced with different cartoon styles illustrating ESL materials.

Another possibility, quite closely related to the way of teaching, is that the materials will present activities and some bits of the language for learners to work with, but include nothing that explains anything to the learners. This pattern seems particularly likely to occur with some modern communicative textbooks, which can be quite useless to learners as reference materials, and so of no help to them if, for instance, they are trying to study independently, or to catch up on a lesson they have missed. Learners may come to see such materials as generally unhelpful, and as a reason for feeling that they are never going to succeed as learners.

In other cases, learners may disagree with, or be offended by, much of the content of reading passages and dialogues. Such materials may represent a distinct gender bias, for example, or may involve subjects that are culturally taboo (perhaps for religious reasons). Such materials may merely lose credibility, or they may even be rejected altogether as totally unusable.

9.7 Receptivity to being a successful language learner

Put negatively this may sound like a rather odd issue: how could anyone not be open to the idea of being successful? But let us start with the positive side. Many school children, apparently, like the thought of taking a foreign language because it offers the chance of success, a chance not offered by other subjects which they see as being more 'academic'. They can imagine themselves being successful and they are open to the possibility of success, at least for the first year or so, but after that many seem to decide that success in language learning is not for them. Perhaps part of the problem is that such disenchanted, disillusioned learners have really closed themselves to the possibility of being successful. Such a decision may be quite realistic, given the learners' experiences. (We shall see later how the 'graded objectives' movement in Britain has sought to restore faith in the possibility of continued success for a majority of learners.)

In quite different learning circumstances, it is possible to imagine a learner being afraid of success with reason, because of what success might bring. To take but one example, a Japanese woman married to an American businessman might be apparently highly motivated to learn English for the sake of communicating with her husband, and yet fear the

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consequences for her life-style as a Japanese person if success in learning English would mean playing a much more active role in helping her husband entertain business guests. Learners do need to feel confident that success will bring positive rewards that at least outweigh the likely extra burdens which that success may also bring.

In some circumstances, learners may also need to be receptive to the idea that complete success is neither possible nor necessary for them. One of the possible causes of drop-out from foreign language classes is the mismatch between high initial hopes of quickly becoming very proficient, and the reality of the large amount of hard work necessary for even a quite modest level of attainment.

9.8 Receptivity to the idea of communicating with others

Many people do not actually enjoy communicating, or attempting to communicate, with others, especially with people from other cultures. Such people are unlikely to enjoy interactive methods of language learning, or the prospect of using whatever they have learned inside the classroom outside in the 'real world'. Such people, it could be said, are not receptive to the whole idea of face-to-face communication. It may be because they lack the self-confidence and self-esteem to deal well with social encounters in general. This area, the topic of 'communication apprehension', has been widely investigated in first-language situations in the field of speech communication (McCroskey 1977; Friedman 1980; Daly and McCroskey 1984).

For many people, communication apprehension may be even more severe when they are speaking in a second or foreign language (Foss and Reitzel 1988). Clearly the lack of target language mastery contributes to this problem, but there are also cultural differences in the handling of social talk, in terms of frequency, duration, topics, participants, etc. Of course, within any given culture there is a great deal of interpersonal variability on this point: some people simply enjoy communicating more than others.

9.9 Summary

We have now considered eight specific issues related to learner receptivity: receptivity to 1) the target language and culture, 2) the teacher as a person, 3) other learners, 4) the teacher's way of teaching, 5) course content, 6) the materials, 7) the idea of being a successful language learner, and 8) the idea of communicating with other people. Although

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research has not yet clearly demonstrated the importance of these issues to language learning, there are some studies which lead us to believe they are worth pursuing.

In the next chapter we will be reviewing some findings of existing research on topics which we have grouped together under the rubric of receptivity. Our coverage of these concerns here represents an initial attempt to map the territory. We have listed them as possible areas that you might wish to pursue, as a reader and classroom researcher, and the next chapter will illustrate just some of the possibilities. Meanwhile, the *Discussion starters, Suggestions for further reading,* and project ideas should enable you to explore in greater depth this whole complex area we have labelled 'receptivity'.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1 Have you ever been in a situation where you had to learn a language that did not appeal to you? Or where you did not feel an affinity for the people and the culture represented by the target language? Have you, as a teacher, met learners in this situation? If so, what was the outcome?

2 Have you, as a language learner, ever been in a class where your initial enthusiasm to learn diminished, either quickly or gradually? If so, what factors influenced your attitude?

3 Have you ever been in a language class in which something about the teacher's behaviour, attitudes or teaching method affected your receptivity to the target language, either negatively or positively? What steps can you take, as a teacher or future teacher, to make sure that your influence on learners' receptivity is positive?

4 As a language learner, have you ever experienced a strong reaction, whether positive or negative, to the content of a language course, or to the teaching materials used? If you have experience as a teacher, have the learners in your classes ever reacted negatively to a course you prepared or to a set of materials you used? What did you do? In retrospect, what could you have done?

5 Have you ever known a learner who was afraid of success for some reason? If so, what was the reason and how was the whole thing dealt with?

6 Have you ever known a good language learner who was a poor communicator, someone who found it very difficult to get along with other people socially? If not, does that mean teachers should be trying to help poor learners with their social skills?

7 In general, in what ways is the teacher responsible for the learners' receptivity, and what responsibility rests with the learners themselves?

How do these potentially different areas of responsibility translate into classroom behaviour, for both teachers and learners?

8 In your experience, either as a teacher or a learner, what is the role of peer pressure in language classrooms? Can peer pressure be a positive as well as a negative influence in language learning?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

1 This chapter owes much to Stevick, and in particular to his 1976 volume, *Memory, meaning and method*, which includes a section entitled 'Learning: defensive or receptive' (pages 109–16).

2 For a description of the introduction, in England and Wales, of French as a primary school subject, and an account of its impact on secondary school language teaching, see Burstall (1970) and Burstall *et al.* (1974).

3 A comprehensive review of language and social attitudes can be found in Giles and St. Clair (1979). Their focus is not on language pedagogy but their material is clearly relevant to many of the issues involved in our field. Other accessible references on language attitudes are by Lambert, Anisfeld, and Yeni-Komshian (1965), Williams (1973a, 1973b); Galvan, Pierce and Underwood (1976); and Ryan and Giles (1982).

4 Communication apprehension in second and foreign language learning has been discussed by McCoy (1979), Lucas (1984), Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), and Foss and Reitzel (1988).

5 For a report of research on gender bias in ESL materials, see Porreca (1984).

6 Gardner (1979) has conducted survey research in which teachers reported their views of American Indian children's motivation to speak English (see section 9.3). His graphs depicting the teachers' ideas about peer pressure are relevant to the points raised here.

7 Bailey's (1980) analysis of her French class diary documented an initially high motivation followed by a sharp drop in motivation as the class progressed. The same pattern emerged in a diary study by Jones (1977) in her learning of Indonesian.

8 There is some evidence to suggest that learners do better in language classes where the way of teaching matches their own learning style preferences. This literature is reviewed in Chapter 12 of Hatch (1983).

MINI-PROJECT: TYPES OF RECEPTIVITY

1 Thinking of your own language learning experience, how important are each of the eight aspects of receptivity discussed in Chapter 9? Using

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the list below, rate each of the eight, individually, on a five-point scale of importance (where 5 = very important and 1 = unimportant).

a) receptivity to the target language and
culture   5   4   3   2   1
b) receptivity to the teacher as a person   5   4   3   2   1
c) receptivity to fellow learners   5   4   3   2   1
d) receptivity to the teacher's way of teaching   5   4   3   2   1
e) receptivity to course content   5   4   3   2   1
f) receptivity to teaching materials   5   4   3   2   1
g) receptivity to the idea of being a successful
language learner   5   4   3   2   1
h) receptivity to the idea of communicating
with others   5   4   3   2   1

2 After you have completed your individual ratings of these categories you can then rank order the items in terms of their importance as you assessed them. That is, you can list these items from most to least important, indicating any tied ranks.

3 If you are working with a group, you could also compare your ratings with those of your colleagues as a way of starting a discussion with them. Is your rank ordering similar to theirs? If you compute the average ratings for each item on the above list, what is the group's ranking of the items' importance?

4 In the process of rating, ranking and discussing these items, you may find that the list does not include some types of receptivity which you or your colleagues consider to be important in language learning. If so, add these ideas to the list. If you wish, you may reconsider the rating and ranking of the items on this expanded list.

5 Look back at the transcripts you have worked with in earlier mini-projects in this book. Is there evidence of either receptivity or defensiveness among the learners in any of these transcripts? If you were to observe an actual language class in progress, what behaviour would you accept as evidence of receptiveness, or of defensiveness? Either on your own or with a group, make a list of observable features of classroom interaction which would constitute evidence of either state.

6 Finally, observe a language class (or tape-record one that you are teaching) and try to find such evidence in the record. What does this process suggest to you about our original list or about your list of potential evidence?

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MAJOR PROJECT: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A LANGUAGE LEARNER

It is a truism that 'we teach as we have been taught'. Given this principle, many language teachers have found it useful to look back on their own experiences as language learners and to reflect on the influence of their language learning experiences on their development as teachers. Our suggestion for this major project, then, is that you write your own retrospective autobiography as a language learner, particularly with the idea of receptivity as a possible organising theme. Depending on the experiences you have had, and the depth with which you choose to record your history, this project could be very substantial.

We suggest that you begin with a time line, organising your experiences in chronological order. Write what you can remember, thinking about the eight topics on our list of issues related to receptivity. Finally, try to see how each experience has influenced you as a teacher (or may influence you, if you are a pre-service teacher). If you are working with a group, it may be useful to share your autobiography with your colleagues, to look for similarities and differences. Does your autobiography suggest any research topics which you could explore, either through naturalistic enquiry, experimental studies, or action research?

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10 Receptivity – some relevant research

Chapter 9 introduced the term receptivity and offered brief accounts of eight issues that link receptivity to classroom language learning and teaching. In this way we hoped to bring together a number of topics that are clearly related, but that are normally treated under quite separate headings. Now, in Chapter 10, we will be looking at examples of research studies that similarly might not otherwise be brought together. We see them all as related, however, to the general notion of receptivity introduced in Chapter 9.

We start with research that does not use the term receptivity, but which can easily be related to several of our eight issues in Chapter 9.

10.1 Receptivity as attention

A receptive learner is an attentive learner, presumably, so it makes sense to look at how attention in language classes has been studied. We have reasons to feel that attention is an important factor in classroom language learning even though Krashen has suggested (for example, 1982) that language acquisition which occurs outside of conscious awareness is more effective than conscious learning. Newmark (1972) once argued that language teaching is above all a matter of getting and of keeping learners' attention. We noted in Figure 8 (section 7.3) that attention is one of the unobservable factors in classroom participation. And van Lier has suggested (personal communication) that the learners' attention is the key component which converts input into intake.

Although we know we learn a great deal in our everyday lives without having to be taught (learning to recognise other people's faces, for example), it is still surely reasonable to believe that attending to what a teacher is trying to teach will be more helpful than not attending to it. If our learners' attention wanders away from the task at hand and they start thinking about, say, how long it is to lunchtime, then surely there is very little chance of their learning anything more until their attention is once more attracted somehow. But if we accept attention as a potentially interesting way of looking at receptivity in the language classroom, how are we going to measure attention, for research purposes? Certainly teachers develop their own ways of identifying learners who are not

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attending, and they probably rely on things like posture and eye movements, but learners also develop their own ways of looking as if they are attending even when they really are thinking about something else entirely. It becomes impossible to measure attention validly or reliably just by observing learners in the classroom.

It may seem equally invalid to simply ask the learners directly what they are thinking about, in the middle of a lesson, but one researcher has done just that, with intriguing results. You will recall from our discussion of participation in section 7.3 that Cohen (as reported in Cohen and Hosenfeld 1981) got permission from a number of teachers at different levels and in different settings (all in Israel) to stop their classes at some point. He then asked the learners to write down, at the moment they were stopped, what was in the forefront of their consciousness. By this simple measure the 'best' attention estimate he obtained was one of eighty-two per cent, in one class, for the proportion of learners who wrote down the topic of the lesson as what was on their mind. The average over a number of classes was about fifty per cent, suggesting that we might expect only about half of any class to be paying attention at any one time.

Cohen's figures may not be entirely valid, of course, because learners might be reluctant to paint too unfavourable a picture of themselves. But if that is the case, the true picture would be even less encouraging for the language teaching profession. Cohen's data may also not be representative, however, of other teaching situations (the generalisability issue). We should certainly not take his rather depressing figures for granted, but rather think of his work as an ingenious opening up of yet another possible step that teachers might take to find out something more about what is going on in their classrooms.

However interesting it may be to have some idea about how many learners are attending at any one time, it would be even more interesting to know why those who are not attending have, if only for the moment, switched off. Some ideas can be obtained by looking at the answers of those learners who wrote down something other than the lesson topic. But if they write, as some do, something to do with food, that only tells us that hunger, at that point, was winning the battle for their attention. There might have been other equally hungry learners who were nevertheless still attending to the lesson. What we need to know is *why* the thought of food prevailed for some, and why others were still concentrating on the lesson. Which of the eight aspects of receptivity outlined above were involved? Were the materials dull, fellow learners insufferable, or was hunger itself really the key factor? These are all questions that could be addressed in action research projects. Certainly they have a local and practical perspective, rather than a global and theoretical one.

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10.2 Insights from language learners

One approach, although it was not originally intended to illuminate the issue of receptivity, has in fact offered us some clues that are worth mentioning here. We are referring to the diary studies (Bailey 1983a; Bailey and Ochsner 1983; Matsumoto 1987). A diary study is a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience in which the researcher/author is also typically the subject. For example, two experienced teachers and researchers, John and Francine Schumann (1977), started investigating their own experiences as language learners by keeping detailed diaries, following Progoff's (1975) 'journal-keeping' procedures. In their reports of learning Farsi in Los Angeles and Iran, and Tunisian Arabic in Tunisia, they identified from their diary entries what seemed to them to be the key factors that either helped or hindered their learning.

To their surprise they found that they were not at all receptive to the teaching method used with them (section 9.4), causing total withdrawal from the class in one case (an option, we should note, that is not normally open to school children). Francine Schumann also found herself unreceptive to the teaching materials available for self-instruction, partly on account of the boring nature of their carrier content (section 9.5) and partly because of their physical appearance (section 9.6). Luckily she tried using illustrated books for children, and found them both very attractive and above all very useful, in spite of their being genuine illustrated story books for native speakers of Farsi (authentic materials), and not language teaching materials at all.

In relation to content, again, John Schumann found himself unreceptive to the course he was attending because he found he had a 'personal agenda' for his language learning, an agenda that was being frustrated by the course syllabus. He also found himself unreceptive to the teaching method (section 9.4 again) because it required active participation of him, when all he wanted to do was to learn by what he called 'eavesdropping' on what was going on in the classroom (section 9.8). And they both had problems external to the classroom that made it difficult to concentrate on their language learning, in addition to everything else (section 9.1). John wrote about what he called 'transition anxiety' — a delibitating sort of anxiety he associated with moving from country to country, or simply with moving from one house to another. Francine wrote about something similar — her inability to concentrate on her language learning until she had properly settled into her new surroundings. She wrote of her 'nesting patterns' — her problems with living out of suitcases and being unable to create a satisfactory living environment under such circumstances. Both John's transition anxiety and Francine's nesting patterns are presage variables — factors which the

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learners experienced external to the classroom, but which influenced their classroom language learning nonetheless.

Thus the Schumanns' paper, which was one of the earliest published diary studies, highlighted five of the eight aspects of receptivity outlined at the start of the chapter. Later Bailey's (1980) initial analysis of her experience studying French as a foreign language dealt with two more: the idea of being a successful language learner (9.7), and problems in relating to other learners (9.3). She found that, given the pressures exerted by various affective considerations in the classroom, her initially high level of motivation to learn French declined sharply during the second week of the course. It took several weeks for her enthusiasm to climb back gradually to its earlier high levels. In the meantime, she continually reassessed her self-awareness about what it means to be a successful language learner. Her ideas on this point were directly related to her attitudes about the other learners (point 9.3).

Later diary studies have led to a stronger emphasis on the issue of anxiety as a factor in classroom language learning. Before looking at any more studies, however, we should first look at the notion of anxiety itself.

10.3 Anxiety in language learning

The first thing to say about anxiety is that, despite the unpleasant associations we may have with it, it is not necessarily a bad thing in itself. Researchers distinguish between 'debilitating anxiety', which gets in the way, and 'facilitating anxiety', which actually helps people do better than they might otherwise (Kleinmann 1977; Scovel 1978). The idea is not really so very paradoxical, because we all know that sometimes we find it difficult to produce our best (whether it is at learning, or teaching, or playing tennis) if we know that success is virtually guaranteed, if there is no reason to be at all anxious about the possibility of failure. Knowing that success is not guaranteed, but that making a real effort might make all the difference between success and failure, we may do better precisely because our anxiety has spurred us on. If, on the other hand, we would really like to succeed but feel that, no matter how hard we try, we are most likely to fail, then our anxiety is likely to make it even more difficult for us to produce our best. Some aspects of receptivity, then, are not dependent upon just *removing* anxiety, but upon minimising the sources of debilitating anxiety, and optimising the sources of facilitating anxiety so that learners can work with what we might call 'relaxed concentration'.

But is anxiety, for good or ill, a major factor anyway? We do know, in part due to work in North America, that we can expect a relationship between anxiety and speech skills in foreign language learning. (See, for example, a report by Gardner *et al.* 1976, of a survey involving over one

thousand Canadian high school students of French.) As one might expect, the more anxious learners are, the less likely they are to do well at speech skills. Furthermore, the older they are and the further they get in the compulsory school system, the stronger this relationship will probably become. Unfortunately it is impossible to say whether it is the increasing anxiety that gets in the way of developing good speech skills, or whether, as may seem at least equally likely, it is the poor speech skills that themselves create the anxiety, as it becomes increasingly embarrassing to have been studying a language but not to have become good at speaking it. Perhaps even more likely is the possibility that the two problems feed off each other.

Another point to keep in mind is the distinction between 'trait anxiety' (a relatively permanent personality feature) and the less stable 'state anxiety' (Scovel 1978). State anxiety – stage fright, for example – is evoked by a particular set of temporary circumstances. As a result of their massive survey of Canadian learners of French, Gardner *et al.* decided that the phenomenon of language classroom anxiety was so widespread as to be an identifiable type of state anxiety.

So anxiety, especially state anxiety, is an acknowledged feature of language learning, whether as cause, effect, or both. But why should anxiety be a special problem for *language* learners? Certainly some school children spend a great deal of their time anxious about most, if not all, of their school subjects, so why should language learning be any different? One possibility, at least wherever methods are used that rely on banishing the learners' first language from the classroom (but perhaps whenever language learners are required to perform in the target language), is that language teaching deprives learners of their normal means of communication and so of the ability to behave fully as normal people. It takes something away from their humanness. Certainly learners report that one of their major worries is that when forced to use the language they are learning they constantly feel that they are representing themselves badly, showing only some of their real personality, only some of their real intelligence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this sort of deprivation seems apt to breed anxiety about communicating with others (section 9.8) and just the sort of anxiety that will get in the way of doing well both in class and out of it, since it could inhibit the learners' use of the target language and thus deprive them of the potential profit to be obtained from practising what has been learned. In other instances, the teaching method itself (for example, the rapid drills of the audiolingual method or the teacher's silence in the Silent Way) may lead to learner anxiety.

The problem is conceivably even worse for learners who have just arrived in the country whose language they are learning, because, unless they find a community of compatriots to live with (and that in itself will

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probably cause other problems), they will be misrepresenting themselves not just in the classroom but in everything they do, beginning with a task as simple as getting on a bus. This feeling of 'language shock' has been likened to schizophrenia, where the learners have a self that is perfectly capable of behaving normally in the right linguistic and cultural setting, but are forced by the circumstances to display a self that is fundamentally incompetent in all those things that everybody else around takes completely for granted (Schumann 1975).

Language learning is therefore especially likely to provoke anxiety because it deprives learners of the means of behaving normally. But its aim is precisely to provide them with the means of behaving normally, eventually, and being fully themselves, with people of another language and probably of another culture. This brings in another possible source of debilitating anxiety. In a sense, learning someone else's language means acquiring a way of looking at things from a different angle, getting a new world view. This itself can be seen as threatening rather than exciting, because it means having two, perhaps somewhat contradictory, ways of looking at everything. And it also means being associated, in some way, with that alternative world view. This relates to the background issues introduced at the beginning of Chapter 9, and is often discussed in the literature under the heading of 'anomie' – the feeling of being caught between two cultural groups, and not belonging to either of them (Schumann 1975).

In these ways language learning can represent a threat to a learner's sense of identity. This may sound rather far-fetched in relation to foreign language teaching in compulsory school systems, where typically the levels of success are probably so modest that no one's identity is likely to be at all threatened. But even in such circumstances language learning still seems to be an anxiety-breeding business, because, as we have seen, the way we set about teaching foreign languages in the classroom often temporarily deprives learners of their mother tongue – the very means of communication they might otherwise use in other lessons to help them overcome their problems. Also, to account for anxiety in language classes where the use of the mother tongue is allowed, which may be the majority of classes around the world, we can point to the problem that performing in a foreign language class is in itself potentially somehow more stressful than performing in other subject classes. In mathematics, for example, you may get the answer wrong, but at least you can be reasonably sure of saying the numbers correctly. In language work, by contrast, even if in a sense you get the answer right (you find the correct form of the verb, say, in a blank-filling item) you may still make an almost infinite number of mistakes in what you say – for example with imperfect pronunciation of individual sounds, wrong word stress, wrong sentence stress, and so on. For this reason, the probability of being wrong in some way or other is

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vastly greater in language learning than in other subjects. And being 'wrong', given many language teachers' views on how important it is to correct errors, is, at best, an open invitation to a more or less mild form of public humiliation (as we saw in the transcript about Carlos's trousers). In short, the risk of making a fool of yourself in a language class is very high, and you need to be a singularly robust character to avoid being affected adversely by feelings of anxiety in such a setting.

The following entries from Cherchalli's diary and interview research with Algerian secondary school learners illustrate these points:

1 'When the teacher is giving explanations my heart beats strongly and I keep saying to myself: "It's going to be my turn now".'
2 'Today the teacher has insisted a lot on tenses. I had beads of sweat! Me and English tenses have never agreed!'
3 'Today we had a quiz. It was very easy but I was so anxious about the second exercise that I couldn't work.'
4 'I'll never forget today and the shame I felt. Everything started when the English teacher asked me to read a few sentences on the blackboard ....'
(Cherchalli 1988)

These comments were taken from language learners' diaries. The learners' discomfort might or might not have been apparent to the teacher or to an outside observer.

Ironically, some learners (the most competent ones) get anxious because they know they could avoid making most of the mistakes other people are making, but, if they do so, they also know that they will stand out from the crowd and perhaps be actively resented for their relative success (a classroom form of the 'fear of success' that was introduced in section 9.7). If they deliberately make some of the (for them avoidable) mistakes other people are making, they will appear 'normal' to the rest of the class. Unfortunately, they will perhaps be regarded as lazy by the teacher (if he or she knows how competent they really are) or even as actually less competent than they really are. Such learners sometimes try to resolve the issue by withdrawing from class interaction, which carries the new risk that they will now be branded as somewhat unco-operative.

There are good reasons, then, why language learning is likely to be anxiety breeding. As Cherchalli's work has shown, if we go back to the learners' diaries we find very considerable evidence of anxiety related to the points just made about possible reasons why language learners have good reason to be anxious.

10.4 Competitiveness in classroom language learning

Bailey's work (1983a) surveying a dozen diary studies brought in another factor which deserves mention here. She noticed that there appeared to be a consistent relationship between anxiety and competitiveness. Quite simply, a surprising number of the diarists revealed themselves to be rather strongly competitive in their language classes, and this itself appeared to be a major source of anxiety for them. Some seemed preoccupied with the strain of wanting to be the 'best', others with the strain of being among the 'worst'. In either case the anxiety was often debilitating rather than helpful. Francine Schumann wrote about it quite explicitly, reporting that she felt guilty when her husband was studying and she was not:

> This guilt was a result of my competitive feeling that if I didn't work as much as he did, he would get further ahead .... Instead of causing me to work harder, this competitiveness resulted in my feeling frustrated and led to a reduced effort.
> (Schumann 1980:53)

While there are problems associated with this sort of self-report (specifically with taking self-evaluation as a true indicator of motives), we cannot disregard the learner's analysis of her feelings.

Influenced by Francine Schumann's work, Bailey reviewed the diary studies that were available at the time, looking for evidence of competitiveness. Where learners did comment on their competitive tendencies (for example, by talking about racing with their classmates, or by comparing their mastery and/or grades with others'), such entries often also included comments on their anxiety levels. Figure 9 opposite reflects Bailey's attempt to depict the interrelations between these two affective phenomena.

Here we have another example of classroom research (this time via the data collection procedure of keeping a diary) generating a pictorial scheme or model of behaviour. Such models, as we saw with Long's and Chaudron's models of error treatment behaviour, are open to empirical testing by other researchers. They may also suggest insights for teachers, who can observe their own behaviour, or that of their learners, and compare it with the model. Such comparisons allow us to perceive patterns, to detect systematicity (where it exists) across different learners in various classroom settings.

We must be careful of making too much of these early diary studies, however, if only because most of them were written by experienced teachers whose egos might have been more threatened in classrooms than those of 'ordinary' learners would have been. Teaching is recognised as an anxiety-breeding profession, and when teachers put themselves in the
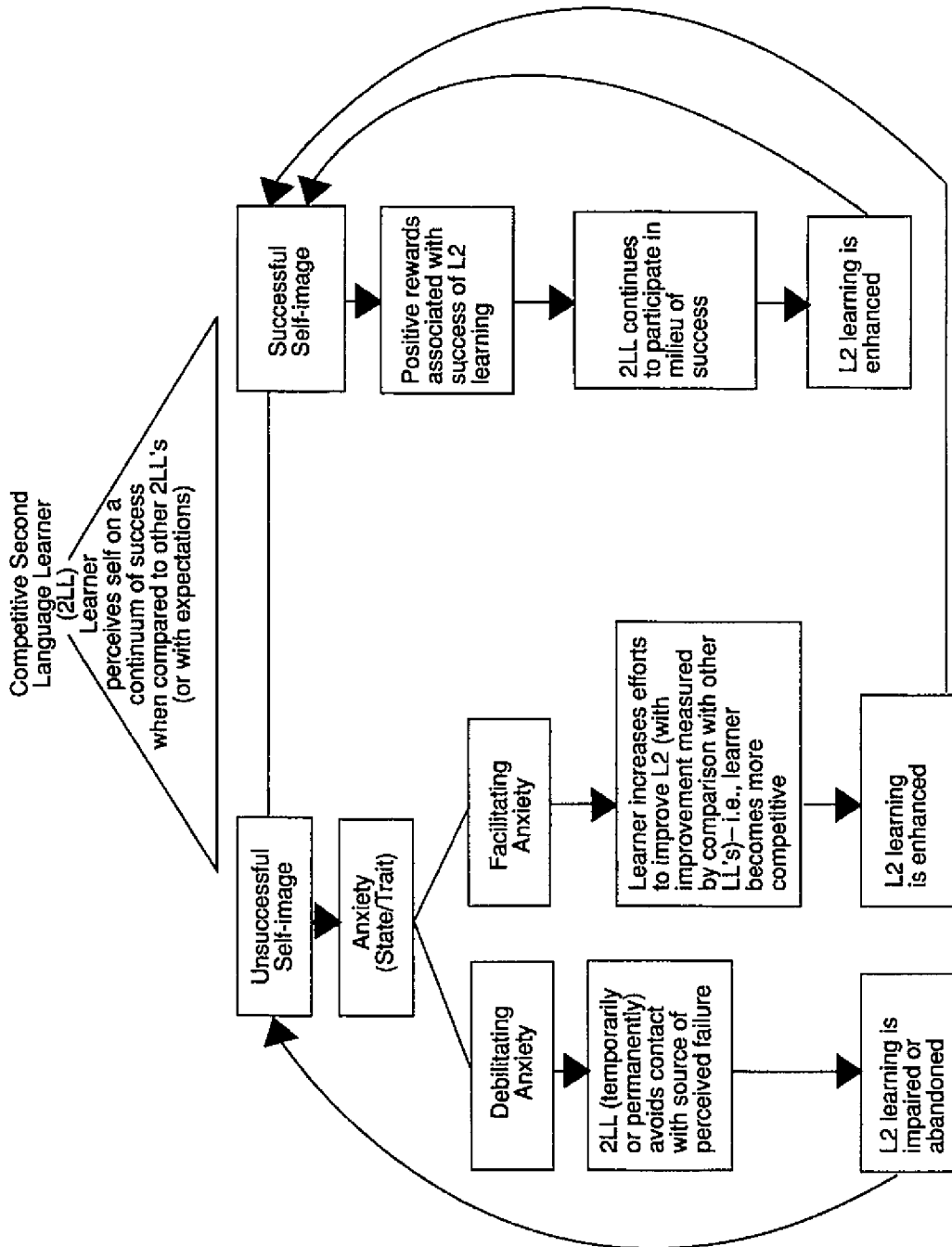
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Figure 9 *A model of competitiveness and anxiety in the second language learner* (Bailey 1983a:97)

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role of learner we might expect them to be extra nervous about their classroom performance, feeling that somehow they should, as teachers, be superior to their fellow learners. But the diary studies have alerted us to the potential importance of competitiveness, and in particular its possible role in contributing to language classroom anxiety.

Other caveats can also be raised regarding the diary studies. Like other forms of self-report, they may be subject to a self-flattery factor (see Oller 1979). They may also be highly selective in terms of the event-sampling that gets reported in the final papers (Bailey and Ochsner 1983) if the diarists edit their excerpts too heavily. Furthermore, we are not sure to what extent the very process of keeping a diary influences the language learning experience (Brown 1985a). While such influence can, in fact, be positive, it may mean that the resulting summary does not depict an experience that is representative of what the learner's experience would have been without the diary-keeping process.

10.5 Self-esteem in language learning

Both competitiveness and anxiety relate to a further factor – self-esteem. Language learning poses a threat to a person's self-esteem, as would any task where success was not guaranteed and the probability of making a fool of oneself was (so) very high. In a classroom where all the other learners might be better learners than you (especially if they are people you do not already know and so cannot eliminate as potential competition), they might, to preserve their own self-esteem, be quite willing to give you public proof of their superiority.

But is self-esteem known to be important? Heyde's work suggests so, especially if we make distinctions between self-esteem in general, self-esteem with regard to a particular type of situation (work, home, school, etc.), and self-esteem with regard to a particular task. Heyde found all three types of self-esteem correlated positively with oral performance in French for some American college students, but that self-esteem with regard to the particular language learning task was the most strongly related to performance. (See Heyde 1977, and Heyde-Parsons 1983, for further details.)

Unfortunately, as always with such correlation studies, it is impossible to say with confidence whether high self-esteem is a cause of success or the product of it (and Chaudron 1984b has pointed out that there are problems with Heyde-Parson's use of statistics in her 1983 study). Common sense would suggest, as we noted earlier for anxiety, that they feed on each other, so that, for example, if learners do succeed in a task, their self-esteem is reinforced. This means they approach the next task with more confidence, which itself means a smaller likelihood of experi-

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encing debilitating anxiety about it (as Figure 9 suggests), and so success is more likely because they can concentrate better, and so on.

Heyde's work would have been incomplete without some attempt to study the sorts of classroom behaviour patterns that appear either to enhance or depress self-esteem. Although no causal connections can be established, she was able to point to differences in the behaviour patterns of learners with high self-esteem and learners with low self-esteem. As we might have expected, learners with high self-esteem hesitated less, corrected themselves more, did not need prompting, and so on. Of much greater interest were the findings relating to the way their teachers interacted with them and to what happened to their self-esteem scores after they had completed a speaking task in class.

Learners who started off with quite low self-esteem scores had sharply lower scores afterwards 1) if, for example, their teacher put pressure on them to monitor their own speech and correct themselves as they went along. The same sharp drop in scores occurred 2) if their teacher constantly interrupted to correct students, and 3) if their teacher simply repeated the question in its original wording when students failed to respond. (In this study Heyde used short-term measures of self-esteem: no longitudinal measurement was made.)

The first two interactions mentioned above are easy to understand in terms of anxiety and self-esteem, but the third may need a few words of comment. If you ask someone a question and that person does not understand what you are trying to say, the natural thing is to assume there was something wrong with the question and try to find a different way of asking it. Simply repeating the question the way it was phrased the first time amounts to suggesting that there was something wrong with the other person, not with the question itself. So a straight repeat becomes a challenge to the other person's competence – a put-down, a blow to the other person's self-esteem. (This, in fact, is what the teacher does to Carlos in the transcript excerpt printed in section 6.7.) No put-down may be intended of course, and in language classes it may be important to give a learner a second chance to hear the original wording of a question, but the effect may be the same psychologically, especially if, as Heyde noted, the teacher does not adopt a generally positive and encouraging tone. Perhaps we should also note here that when Gaies (1983b) looked at the way language teachers responded to learners' indications that they needed help he found that straight repeats were second only to some form of extended repeat in terms of frequency. That is to say, one of their most common reactions was a potentially challenging put-down. Gaies found no evidence that the teachers were adapting appropriately depending on the nature of the problems indicated by their learners.

Heyde also presents some interesting anecdotal information related to

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cases where students performed quite badly and yet subsequently raised their self-esteem scores. In such cases, the teacher tended to give very little feedback or guidance of any kind, and tended to make somewhat ambiguous noises when students made direct or indirect requests for approval. Heyde suggests that students might legitimately have interpreted such noises and the general lack of feedback as wholly positive, indicating that everything was fine. One can imagine, however, that getting low marks when you have been led to expect good ones in this way must be even more demoralising, even more of a blow to one's self-esteem in the long run, than getting low marks when you have not been led to expect anything better.

Heyde's work does help us build up a general picture of receptivity in relation to language classroom interaction. The picture is of a situation fraught with risks, a situation more delicate than most in education, and one that calls for special attention. Such a thought may remind the reader of Chapter 4, where we were discussing (in what may have appeared at that point to be rather unduly dramatic terms) the potential risks involved for teachers and learners if they find themselves involved in a research project. After Heyde's work it is perhaps easier to appreciate that such problems can be very real ones, with real consequences for learners' progress.

10.6 Parent/child/adult roles in language classrooms

We should also consider how the problems of receptivity tie in with patterns of language classroom interaction discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. A procedure for examining this relationship has been pioneered by Hines in New York. She used Fanselow's (1977a) FOCUS system (see Appendix C) and the categories of Transactional Analysis (Harris 1967) to investigate relationships between aspects of teachers' behaviour and learner participation.

Transactional Analysis (Harris 1967) includes the psychological concept that within any individual there are (at least) three possible sources of emotional information which result in three different roles that an individual may take. These roles and the information associated with them are listed below:

1 the 'parent' – those memories, rules and values learned in one's childhood and associated with authority figures;
2 the 'child' – the memories and feelings associated with childhood dependency; and
3 the 'adult' – the functioning individual who is able to make decisions and act independently.

Hines used the categories of Transactional Analysis to categorise teacher

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behaviour (using extremely high-inference categories) as representative of the teacher as either a) a Parent being 'nurturing', b) a Parent being 'critical', c) an Adult being 'neutral', or d) a Child being 'playful'. Hines found that language students made the most errors after teacher behaviour she classified as that of a 'Critical Parent', as if the critical tone set by the teacher (recall Heyde's findings related to teachers' tone) actually frightened the learners into making more mistakes than they might have otherwise. In cases where there was generally little opportunity for students to talk spontaneously she nevertheless found that spontaneous talk happened most frequently, by far, when the teacher was classified as a 'Neutral Adult', and least often, also by far, with the 'Critical Parent' sort of teacher behaviour (Hines 1983).

While comparing the teacher with the Adult or the Parent, and the adult learner with the Child of Transactional Analysis may seem far-fetched, this analogy has also appeared, independently of Hines' work, in some of the language learning diaries. Jones (1977), Leichman (1977), and Plummer (1976) have all likened themselves (as learners) to children and the teacher to a parent, utilising these terms with the specialised meanings they have in Transactional Analysis. In Plummer's case, having this child's role reportedly allowed her to adopt some childlike behaviours which she felt were useful to her language learning. For instance, Plummer had a 'language learning buddy' in her Indonesian class, with whom she would engage in language play. (Language play is a phenomenon which involves using the language not primarily for its referential meaning, but rather for fun. Characteristics of language play include loudness, exaggerated pitch, lilting intonation, the incorporation of singing into the speech, rhyming sounds, phonological mimicry, altered tempo, and made-up words.) In child language acquisition, language play is thought to provide practice opportunities in an intense affective climate. But while language play is well documented in first language acquisition (Garvey 1977) and child second language acquisition (Peck 1980), it is a less prevalent mode of behaviour in adult second language learning. Yet Plummer's diary provides evidence of adults participating in language play, and documents her perception that doing so helped her learn Indonesian.

We must, of course, be wary of over-interpreting such results, limited as they are in scope and limited as they also are by the impossibility of demonstrating causal relationships. But Hines' work and that of the diarists does help us have more confidence in our contention that receptivity is important, that we are not just being 'soft' to imagine that receptivity matters. Hines has demonstrated how the learning opportunities that are available to learners can be directly affected by the teacher's attitude and behaviour. This relationship is clearly a matter of the learners' receptivity rather than of simply the teaching method.

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10.7 Motivation, reinforcement and receptivity

Of interest in this connection is research on motivation. It seems entirely reasonable to suggest that motivation matters in classrooms, that the most motivated learners are likely to be the most receptive ones, at least as long as the teaching meets their needs. But *how* does motivation help? Is it by some hidden process that we can only guess at, or can we see motivation in action in the classroom?

Work in Canada has shown that learners with different types of motivation may display different patterns of interaction in the language classroom and different study habits generally (Gardner *et al.* 1976). As one would expect, in their study strongly motivated students tended to spend more time working outside class (doing homework, for example) and to participate more actively in class as well. Less obviously, the extent of learners' participation in class seems to depend also on the type of motivation, and not just its strength or intensity. Learners with an 'integrative motivation', who wished to learn in order to relate better to, and integrate with, the speakers of the target language, tended to be much more active in class, volunteering more, making more correct responses, etc. In so doing they received more positive reinforcement or encouragement than the 'instrumentally motivated' learners (learners who just wanted academic success or perhaps to get a job for which there is a language requirement). So once again we have a situation where a certain pattern of receptivity (in this case in the form of integrative motivation – receptivity to the people represented by the language being learned, one of our background issues) appears to make an important difference in classroom interaction. Positive reinforcement will enhance self-esteem, and that will probably lead to better performance on future tasks (perhaps because any anxiety is more likely to be of the facilitating rather than the debilitating variety) and better performance is likely to be rewarded with yet more positive reinforcement, and so on. Of course, this is not to say that instrumentally motivated learners cannot be receptive to learning. In fact, the findings in the research literature on the advantages of being integratively or instrumentally motivated are quite mixed (see Oller 1979).

These relationships between reinforcement and receptivity have been extensively explored in modern language teaching in Britain, in the research associated with the Graded Objectives movement (J. Clark 1980, 1987; Page 1985). Teachers within this movement have exchanged their traditional syllabuses for specifications of functional objectives. These objectives are coupled with assessment schemes which directly test the practical achievement of these objectives and are criterion-referenced so that anyone who reaches seventy-five per cent, say, is awarded a certificate that specifies the competencies achieved. In this way many

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more children are getting much more positive reinforcement – because they are being faced with meaningful classroom tasks that are incrementally arranged so as to be achievable. Learners who were previously quite recalcitrant have been showing great determination in their efforts to win certificates, much to the surprise and delight of their teachers and their parents. Even more significant, in national and 'theoretical' terms, is the fact that there is strong evidence that involvement in graded objectives work so improves learner receptivity to the whole idea of being a language learner that more children are opting to carry on learning a foreign language when it is no longer compulsory. Previously there had been a major problem of learners dropping out of language classes, especially among boys, but the Graded Objectives movement has been so successful in some cases that it seems there might be a problem of coping with the numbers of children who now wish to continue their language studies. It all seems too good to be true, perhaps, but the movement is well documented and carefully researched (see, for example, Page 1985). If the above interpretation is correct, as seems most likely, then we now have a clear demonstration of how receptivity can be enhanced through classroom procedures that bring about positive reinforcement.

10.8 Summary

This chapter has used the general and probably unfamiliar term 'receptivity' to unite a number of topics more commonly dealt with as completely separate categories – especially attention, anxiety, competitiveness, self-esteem, and motivation. It has shown how these factors relate to some major threats to learners' receptivity, and so to their probable learning effectiveness. Other related issues which we have not explored include language learners' investment and self-determination. These topics are just beginning to be investigated by classroom researchers (such as Allwright 1988b).

Even more strongly than elsewhere in this volume, however, we have to emphasise that the findings to date are far from definite. In many cases we have been dealing with relatively unvalidated research procedures, however novel and ingenious, and of course with relatively few studies. Statistical forms of generalisation are generally not possible, therefore, and appeal has to be made instead to more human judgement. Certainly the research procedures themselves stand in need of development, and many replication studies are also indicated, if we are to make more confident claims about the relationships we are beginning to see.

A good number of the issues we have raised under the heading of receptivity, however, would lend themselves to action research projects.

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Receptivity: some relevant research

Such projects, if well enough carried out and documented, could make a considerable contribution to our general understanding of this complex area. The *Discussion starters* and suggestions for practical activities that follow have been designed with this goal in mind, to encourage teachers to become more actively involved in this important work.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1 Receptivity, as presented in the chapter, seems very closely linked to attention, as if you could only learn what you had consciously attended to. But language pedagogy (that is, language teaching theory) often stresses the value of incidental learning, learning out of awareness, when you are actively concentrating on doing something else (like having a conversation). Is there a real paradox here, or can we happily talk about subconscious receptivity?

2 Do you find it easy to believe Cohen's figure of only about 50 per cent of learners attending to a lesson at any given moment? Does it mesh with your recollections of your own attention patterns in language classes? Should teachers be concerned about the issue of attention? If so, what can teachers do to promote greater attention among second language learners? Is attending or not attending to a lesson an either/or proposition, or are there degrees of attention in learners' involvement with their language lessons?

3 From your own experience as a teacher and/or a language learner, does it seem reasonable to suggest that language learning is more anxiety-provoking, more prone to engender competitiveness, and more threatening to one's self-esteem, than other subjects on the curriculum? Why, or why not?

4 Research suggests that motivation both produces and is produced by positive achievement. Does this ring true from your own experience? Do you accept the idea that improving learner motivation is part of the teacher's responsibility? If so, what are some ways that a teacher can enhance second language learners' motivation? To what extent is the learners' motivation beyond the teacher's sphere of influence?

5 If you were to write a diary of your experiences as a language teacher, what sorts of things do you think you would find yourself writing about most often?

6 If your own learners kept diaries of their language learning, what sorts of things do you think they would write about most often? Would you *like* to know what they were writing, or would you rather they kept it to themselves?

7 Does Bailey's model of competitiveness and anxiety in Figure 9 make sense to you as a language learner? Have you ever been in a language

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learning situation where you had either a successful or an unsuccessful self-image? If so, do your experiences fit the model? As a teacher, have you ever been aware of learners who seemed to be anxious or competitive in class? What was the outcome?

8 How would you define 'self-esteem'? Would you agree that it can be parcelled out into the categories of general, situational and task-specific self-esteem? Do you have examples from your own experience?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

1 Scovel (1978) wrote an excellent review of the literature on language learning and anxiety. Kleinmann (1977) ties anxiety to specific linguistic behaviour in terms of what structures second language learners avoid. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed a questionnaire called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, which yielded high reliability indices. The items from the scale are reprinted in their article. More recently, Young and Horwitz (in press) have assembled an entire volume on this topic.

2 Work on self-esteem in language learning is rather limited at this point in time. Two accessible reports on different aspects of the same study are by Heyde (1977; Heyde-Parsons 1983), who adapted constructs from psychology research in her investigation. Heyde's work has been criticised by Chaudron (1984b), and his brief review is also well worth reading. While self-esteem is a fascinating topic and one which appeals to us, as both teachers and learners, its investigation is fraught with research problems. Some of these problems are associated particularly with the use of self-report data (Oller 1979, 1981), which is an issue in many studies related to the cover-all concept of receptivity.

3 Beebe (1983) has written an interesting paper about risk taking and how it may relate to language learning. For instance, she speculates on the risk-taking tendencies of Seliger's HIGs and LIGs (1977, 1983a).

4 For a general discussion of personality factors in language learning, see Brown (1987). Chapter 6, in particular, covers issues such as self-esteem, anxiety, empathy, introversion and extroversion.

5 Some researchers have studied other learners' diaries. As mentioned above, Bailey (1983a) analysed what eleven learners' diaries revealed about their competitiveness and anxiety. Asher (1983) studied the language learning diaries of several American adolescents whom she supervised on a trip to Europe. C. Brown (1983, 1985a, 1985b) used the diary study approach, along with participant observation, to investigate differences between older and younger language learners – specifically their requests for input (1985b). Grandcolas and Soulé-

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Susbielles (1986) utilised diary entries written by future teachers of French as a foreign language, along with other sources of data. (This possibility of using several learners' diaries as a data base will come up again in the practical activities for this chapter.)

6 Bailey and Ochsner (1983) and Matsumoto (1987) have written critical overviews of the diary studies as language research tools.

7 Faerch and Kasper (1987) edited an interesting volume about the use of introspection in second language research. Many of the articles in that book are related to the methodological issues raised here.

8 Cohen and Hosenfeld (1981) wrote an article about the use of what they call 'mentalistic data' in second language research. Seliger (1983b) has written an article critical of such procedures. Reading both articles could lead to an interesting discussion on what can count as evidence.

9 Recently language teachers have experimented with variations on the journal-keeping procedure as pedagogic tools. For an interesting treatment of this topic, see Staton *et al.* (1988).

MINI-PROJECT: ATTENTION

This project is suitable for individual work over one week, but it can also easily be extended as a group project and/or a longitudinal study. The aim is to find out how learners talk about the mechanics of attention in their own classroom experience. Fairly detailed guidelines will be offered because attention is not readily observable and the proposal involves the delicate business of working directly with learners.

This mini-project involves recording a lesson and then playing selected episodes back to the learners and asking them to comment on what factors helped or hindered their attentiveness during the lesson in question. (You could even use some of the recordings made for projects described earlier in this book, provided you still have access to the learners and the events are still fresh in their minds.) As a mini-project, this activity could best be done by an individual, but a group of people could usefully plan the details of all the procedures in common, and then each work with a different class. The project could be completed in just a few days if only one visit was made to each class, or it could easily be extended into a full-scale longitudinal study, as a major project for any one person or group of people. As a longitudinal study it is probably best seen as 'action research', which means that the consciousness-raising effects of the project's procedures can be turned to practical advantage, as input to the improvement of teaching and, one hopes, of learning. The procedures are listed below:

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1 You will need permission to record (at least audio-record) a language lesson, and permission to meet the class very soon afterwards for at least as much time as the lesson itself took. A small class will be easier to manage, but as an alternative, you may try to get permission to withdraw just a handful of learners from a large class for the after-lesson discussion session.

2 While the lesson itself is in progress make a note of episodes where attention seems particularly high, or particularly low. (Keeping a note of the tape counter numbers is the simplest way, and very useful later on, but it means you have to be physically near the recorder in the classroom, to be able to see the counter numbers.)

3 If time allows, you might also note which learners seem particularly attentive or inattentive during the different episodes. If your presence in the classroom is likely, in itself, to affect attentiveness radically, then you will need to stay out of the classroom and enlist the teacher's or a learner's help to listen to the recording with you and identify the 'high' and 'low' episodes. While this step would be time-consuming, it has the benefit of providing a form of investigator triangulation.

4 The next step is to play back the tape to the class (or to a representative group from the class), preferably very soon after the lesson in question (that is, at least the same day), and preferably in the same classroom (to assist the memory). Playing back the whole tape would be very time-consuming, so you might wind ahead on fast forward and play only those episodes you have already identified as being interesting, and perhaps only the beginnings of them (just enough to jog the learners' memories). (In selecting episodes in this way, you will of course have biased your sample – a procedure not acceptable in a full-scale project.) For this replay session, you will need an accurate note of the counter numbers, and some confidence in handling your machine efficiently. It may be worth noting that although videotape would probably be a better 'memory-jogger', it is generally considered to be a more obtrusive data collection device. It is also likely to be much more awkward to manage efficiently during the playback session unless you are thoroughly familiar with the equipment. In addition, the learners may well want to see more, and consequently talk less.

5 For the playback session you will also need to have prepared some questions to make sure the discussion is focused. It will help if you develop a routine of asking exactly the same questions for each episode you play back. (Such a procedure is called an 'interview schedule'. See Spradley 1979, for useful ideas on how to structure an interview and analyse the resulting data.) You will need to phrase your questions carefully to suit the particular learners you are working with. (You will clearly need to be especially careful if you are asking them to use the

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language they are still learning). Just two questions might be enough. For example:

a) At the time of the episode in question would you rate your attention as 'very high', 'high', 'medium', 'low', or 'very low'?

b) Why?

If they say very little in reaction to 'Why?' you may need to prompt them by suggesting some possibilities – such as the content of the lesson at the time, the difficulty level of whatever they were doing, the teaching method being used, the general atmosphere in the class, and so on. Prepare your prompts in advance and use them systematically.

A word of warning is in order here. The whole project may be threatening to the teacher involved, especially if he or she feels that some 'outsider' is going to be sitting in judgement rather than just providing an objective report. It will help if the teacher can be given guarantees of confidentiality, but it will help even more if the whole investigation can be offered as a genuine service to the teacher, as a way of helping the teacher secure yet more attentiveness from the class.

Of course, if you are teaching a language class yourself, you could use your own classroom as the research setting. In this case, you could draw on your own memories of the lesson as well as those of the students. As an alternative, you could team up with a colleague who would act as a non-participant observer while you teach.

Unfortunately, the whole project might also be seen as threatening by the learners, if they fear that anything they say will be immediately relayed to the teacher. Again, guarantees of confidentiality will be important, but if the teacher is in fact to be helped, then he or she will need to know, in general terms at least, what the learners have to say about their attention, and what helps or hinders them in attending to lessons. The learners, in turn, will need to know that their teacher will be given a general report (which preserves their anonymity), and to know why this is necessary and sensible. It should be clear by now that you will need to find, if you possibly can, a class where a good atmosphere of trust and mutual respect already exists between teacher and learners. If you go into a class that is already defensive, your project may do more harm than good. Ideally, you could observe a class taught by a colleague or a classmate, who could then, in turn, observe a class which you teach.

You will probably need to record the playback session as well, so that you don't have to take copious notes under such restricted circumstances. (Indeed, the second language learners may feel more like talking to you about attention if they feel you are attending to them, rather than writing as they talk.) Then it is a matter of working out what factors the learners have mentioned. The easiest thing is to make lists of all the different factors mentioned, then sort them into sets (such as content factors,

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method factors, and so on). You can then calculate the frequency of mention of each of the sets, and find out which set is the most important (at least in numerical terms). Probably some things will not be mentioned very often, but will be given very strong emphasis whenever they are. They will need to be reported separately.

A tidier, but probably less productive, way of running the playback session would be to ask the learners to answer your questions in writing, on a very brief questionnaire sheet, for each episode. This would make the later analysis easier, and eliminate the need for recording the playback session itself, but the learners will probably write much less than they would have said, especially if they are trying to write in the language they are learning. You should also recall, from the discussion in Chapter 4, that questionnaires and interview schedules provide structure, but they can also limit the type of information you may get. The face-to-face interview may allow for more spontaneity on the language learners' part and will certainly give you, as the researcher, opportunities to query and pursue points raised by the learners. Of course, the two techniques, of group discussion and individual questionnaires, could be combined. This procedure would be helpful, but you would then have even more data to analyse afterwards. This combined approach to data collection is probably best seen as a way of extending the project, rather than as a simple alternative procedure.

In addition to the extension just mentioned, there are others that would certainly turn the project into something much more substantial:

1 The scope of the mini-project could easily be extended if various observers went into different classes at the same time, so that a broader picture could emerge of different types of learners in different circumstances. (Different times would also work, but your results might then be confounded by the possibility that time of day influences attentiveness, via fatigue factors.) It would certainly be interesting to know if the same factors seem equally important in a variety of situations, or if different factors emerge, as one might expect. The age of the learners might be important, of course, and the culture they come from, as well as their proficiency levels.

2 Another way of extending the mini-project into a major one would be to follow a class (or classes) over a period of several weeks, again to see if different factors emerge or if results are generally stable. Turning the project into a longitudinal study in this way would again convert it into an action research project – one where the emphasis would change from the descriptive focus of finding out what learners think to that of seeing how consciousness-raising could be harnessed to improve levels of attention in the classroom. This latter idea would need the full co-operation of the teacher, of course, since the teacher would be expected to try to adjust his or her teaching activities to take

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account of the learners' emerging views, to see if the expected benefits could in fact be obtained.

3 A quite different sort of extension could be achieved if the procedures described above were used to look at somewhat different issues. In particular, anxiety and competitiveness could be explored in this way, but both of them would no doubt need even more delicate handling than would the topic of attention, given the extra degree of defensiveness likely to be involved in talking about such matters. Perhaps a class already used to talking about attention could later be approached on the topics of anxiety and competitiveness. They are tricky concepts to handle, however, and it would be necessary to take seriously the problems of definition involved. There are less direct ways of getting at these topics, as can be seen in the next suggested practical activity.

MAJOR PROJECT: DIARY STUDY

This project is suitable for individual work over a period of several weeks. A number of individual projects could very usefully be combined in a collective project. The project aim is to explore learners' reactions to classroom language learning in order to discover what they think is important about what happens in the classroom.

This diary study is presented as a major project because it requires extensive data collection over a period of weeks (unless the data are obtained in an intensive course or during a trip to a place where the target language is spoken). It also requires an unusual degree of co-operation from learners in that it hinges on the possibility of persuading a group of learners to keep diaries of their classroom experiences, and allow those diaries to be analysed to see what emerges. Anyone seriously contemplating adapting the diary study as a full-scale project would be advised to begin with a pilot project along the lines of one of the simpler alternative projects outlined below.

GETTING STARTED

You will need to find a group of learners who can be expected to keep fairly detailed diaries for you. It will help enormously if the learners are able to write their diaries in their own first language. If you have to ask them to write in the language they are learning, then you will need intermediate to advanced learners to start with. Notice that in such circumstances they may want the written work of their diaries to be corrected for them, and you will need to decide whether or not this is a service you can and should, in fact, provide. We believe that the correction of diaries is best avoided if at all possible, since it may lead to

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learners writing about only what they can write about accurately, and take the focus away from the real issue of getting all their thoughts and memories down, however imperfectly. The dilemma is, of course, that the promise of correction may help motivate the learners to write diaries in the first place, while if they use their first language it may be technically better (because you can expect the learners to express their thoughts much better in their mother tongue), but it may be much more difficult to motivate them to bother to write anything at all. On balance, however, it is advisable to try to persuade the learners to accept that their diaries will not be corrected. It may help if you can instead promise that the views they express in their diaries will, with appropriate protection of confidentiality, be passed on so that they can be used in subsequent course planning. The learners will no doubt ask you what you want them to write about, and the answer is whatever comes into their heads. The whole point of the diary study is to get at what is on *their* minds. If you do not have access to a group of learners who will keep diaries for you, you could keep a journal of your own experiences as a language teacher or language learner.

You should make sure that the learners know what is going to happen to their diary entries, once they have been handed in to you. You need to be able to guarantee confidentiality, for example, but you will also need to make it clear that you may want to use direct quotations from their diaries for illustrative purposes. You can promise to change all names, of course, but that will not guarantee that they will not be identifiable. One further point is that they deserve to know if your final report is going to be in any sense publicly available, and if they will get a chance to see it, preferably before it is made available, in case they would wish it to be edited in any way.

Some tips for keeping a diary (that is, for the data collection phase of the research) are listed below. These suggestions are based on the experiences of several teachers who have kept diaries or have had their classes keep diaries.

1 Set aside a regular time and place each day in which to write in your diary.
2 Plan on allowing an amount of time for writing which is at least equal to the period of time spent in the language classroom.
3 Keep your diary in a safe, secure place so you will feel free to write whatever you wish.
4 Do not worry about your style, grammar, or organisation, especially if you are writing in your second language.
5 Carry a small pocket notebook with you so you can make notes about your language learning (or teaching) experience whenever you wish.
6 Support your insights with examples. When you write something down, ask yourself, 'Why do I feel that is important?'

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7 At the end of each diary entry, note any additional thoughts or questions that have occurred to you. You can consider these in more detail later.

COLLECTING THE DIARIES

Several decisions are necessary here. First, should you ask to see the diary entries as they are produced (daily, perhaps) or should you wait until the end of the whole diary-writing project to call for them to be handed in?

Frequent review may not be helpful, because it is likely to loom too large in the learners' minds. A periodic review may be advisable, at which point you could photocopy the entries and begin your analysis. Waiting until the end of the entire period means running the risk of not getting anything at all, but this risk can be lessened by asking learners to fill in a weekly report sheet guaranteeing that they have indeed been keeping their diaries.

Another possibility is to arrange for weekly course discussion sessions, at which the learners are invited to raise as topics anything in their diary entries that they are willing to make public. In this way, they may get to learn that their diary-keeping work is indeed valued as a contribution to course evaluation. That may 'contaminate the data', however, in the sense that they will get to know something of each other's preoccupations and may adjust their own diary entries accordingly. The risk is probably slight, but worth noting as a possibility at the data interpretation stage.

Here is an example of instructions given to language learners keeping diaries for a research project:

> This journal has two purposes. The first is to help you with your language learning. As you write about what you think and feel as a language learner, you will understand yourself and your experience better.
>
> The second purpose is to increase the overall knowledge about language learning so that learning can be increased. You will be asked to leave your language learning journal when you leave (the school). However, your journal will not be read by teachers at (the school). It will be read by researchers interested in language learning.
>
> Your identity and the identity of others you may write about will be unknown (unless you wish it otherwise) to anyone except the researchers. You will be given fifteen minutes a day to write. Please write as if this were your personal journal about your language learning experience.
> (Brown 1985b:280–1)

In this case the journal writers kept their diaries until the end of the training session.

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DATA ANALYSIS

The main task is to discover what the learners think is important about what happens in language lessons. In looking at the diary entries, then, this issue will be your main guide. If you think in terms of being able to report, finally, on a ranked list of topics, with the most important at the top, then clearly you need a way of determining priority. Several considerations need to be taken into account:

a) frequency of mention: the number of times a given topic is identified in the diary entries;

b) distribution of mention: the number of different people who mention a given topic;

c) saliency: the strength of the expression with which a topic is recorded. Only the first two of these are directly quantifiable. The third could be quantified if different verbal expressions could be given numbered ratings as to their strength (with the strongest expressions numbered 5 and the weakest 1 for example) but such judgements would be wholly subjective. This subjectivity could perhaps be reduced if you could persuade other people to assist you with the analysis, by reaching an acceptable level of inter-rater agreement on the rating of the verbal expressions. It may be preferable, however, simply to report your data principally in terms of the quantifiable measures, leaving the saliency aspect as a relatively informal additional dimension, used for illustrative purposes.

MAKING YOUR REPORT

Once you have analysed the diary entries and identified your learners' priorities, you will already have the substance of your report. In writing it up, however, you will need to pay careful attention, especially when selecting illustrative quotations, to respect the confidentiality of the original diary writers.

Further information on keeping and using diaries as language learning research tools can be found in Bailey and Ochsner (1983) and in Matsumoto (1987). Much of the advice in Spradley's (1980) book, *Participant observation*, would also be helpful in terms of analytic procedures to use with qualitative data.

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