Abstract

This study seeks to characterize and compare different classes in the school curriculum in terms of the extent to which they provide opportunities for language learning. The chief contention of this study is that differences in modes of teaching, styles of classroom organization, subject matter content and teacher/pupil behaviour lead to different kinds of classroom interaction - this in turn creates different kinds of conditions in the classroom and thus makes available differential opportunities for language learning. The central concern of this study is therefore, to find out (a) to what extent and in what ways the nature of classroom interaction differs in English, Content subject and Activity classes and (b) the nature of the conditions for language learning that become available in each class as a result of these differences in classroom interaction.

The method of investigation used for this study was observation and analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) of the interaction in English classes, Content subject classes and Activity classes. In order to develop a framework for observation and analysis of classroom interaction in terms of the language learning conditions, research literature on first and second language acquisition was examined - this led to a description of the conditions considered necessary for language learning to take place. The investigation into the problem began with preliminary observations of different classes in four English-medium schools in New Delhi. This preliminary study led to the hypothesis that the conditions prevailing in the Activity classes are more conducive to
language learning than the conditions available in the Content subject classes or the English classes. A representative sample of seven classes from the three groups - English, Content subject and Activity - was then selected for the main study. After a review of the literature on classroom research and on the basis of the framework evolved for comparing the classes, a system for the analysis of classroom interaction was developed. Classroom data was collected using an audio-recorder -- this recording was supplemented with field notes taken by two observers. The transcribed classroom interaction data was coded using the system of analysis developed for the purpose. The numerical information obtained through the analysis of the coded data was used in combination with a qualitative analysis of the interaction in each of the classes in the sample to develop profiles of each class. The classes were then compared in terms of the language learning conditions available in each class as well as in each group of classes.

This comparison indicated that there are marked differences among the three groups of classes in terms of the nature of opportunities for exposure to language input, the nature of the opportunities available for learners to participate in interaction and the nature of the learning environment made available. These findings led to the conclusion that the conditions for language learning available in the Activity classes are more conducive to language learning than those available in the English and Content subject classes.