

**Language of the Classroom Project**  
**Part I: Classroom Observation Report**  
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On May 29 and 30, 2012, I observed teacher Carolina's advanced English class in Miami, Florida. The class was held in a fairly large (approximately twenty feet wide by fifteen feet long) classroom with three long tables arranged in symmetrical rows of five seats per row. The classroom felt quite spacious as there were only four students present, who voluntarily clustered in pairs in the front row (two women) and the back two rows but in adjacent seats (two men). The students were free to select their own seats and sat in approximately the same spots during both classes. The classroom was neat and well-equipped; each student had access to a desktop computer with headphones and the room was outfitted with a projector, sound system, movie screen and large whiteboard, although the only instructional equipment or materials used by the teacher during the lessons was the whiteboard, along with several printed handouts strategically distributed throughout each class for use during form-based activities. The classroom, one of approximately twenty others, is located in a private language school on the fourth floor of a thirty-story skyscraper in downtown Miami. Although the classroom was comfortable, there was a substantial amount of noise emanating from the room across the hall (both classrooms have interior windows and abut a long corridor made busy by the placement of a photocopier just outside the door). The school was bustling with activity, as my observation happened to occur during the first week of the school's summer term.

The class I observed is part of an intensive English program serving international students, most of whom are in the United States on student visas. The program is general (non-academic) in nature, emphasizes the development of speaking and listening skills (reading and writing are also taught, but only as secondary course objectives), and for students who enter the

program as absolute beginners requires thirty-six instructional months to complete. For the majority of the school's students (i.e., those on student visas), the program requires the completion of nineteen instructional hours per week, which are more-or-less evenly divided into five daily sessions of four hours. Carolina's class is part of an advanced-level course (level four in a five-level system), which according to the school's official curriculum corresponds to ILR level 3. However, the students appeared to range in proficiency from ILR level 2+ (Ran, a twenty-eight year old woman from South Korea) to level 3+ (Crissy, a twenty-five year old woman from Brazil) and level 4 (Abdul, an approximately twenty-five year old man from Saudi Arabia). The fourth student (Hernan, an approximately thirty-year old man from Argentina) did not speak enough during either class for me to judge his English proficiency. Although the teacher Carolina, who was born and raised in Puerto Rico and appeared to be in her mid to late twenties, is not a native English speaker, she demonstrated excellent, near-native proficiency in English (ILR level 4+). She has a slight non-native accent and made infrequent lexical errors that in my opinion did not affect the quality of her instruction. Carolina enjoyed an excellent rapport with her students, perhaps aided by her similar age and shared multicultural experiences.

During both classes, the classroom interaction was dominated by Crissy and to a lesser extent Abdul—the two most proficient students in the group. Although Ran spoke on occasion, often after being drafted by the teacher, her contribution to the group talk was noticeably (quantitatively) less than that of Crissy and Abdul. Despite the teacher's attempts to draft Hernan to participate in the academic tasks, he spoke minimally during whole class discussions, although he did interact with his partner Abdul during pair work, which made up a small portion of the total classroom interaction. The majority of the classroom interaction was teacher-fronted (teacher monologue/lecture and teacher-student interaction together comprised an estimated sixty

percent of the total interaction); nevertheless, student-to-student interaction was quantitatively and qualitatively significant (approximately forty percent of the total interaction and often quite spirited). While the majority of the lesson content was meaning-based with minimal correction by the teacher and the students free to control the flow of the conversation (I enjoyed an interesting and informative student-led discussion on how the use of names varies according to language and culture during which the teacher shared knowledge of her primary culture to help inform and guide the lesson), some form-based activities, mostly dealing with phrasal verbs, were incorporated into the lesson content. During both classes, the more structured form-based activities followed meaning-based activities. Notably, during the form-based activities, the teacher tended to follow the IRE sequence, whereas the meaning-based activities had a looser social participation structure with considerable speaker overlap.