

The structuring of language-learning tasks

Elsa Tragant Mestre

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THE STRUCTURING OF LANGUAGE-LEARNING TASKS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgementsv

List of Tablesvii

List of Figuresviii

CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Definition of the term "structuring" and introduction1

1.2. Procedural structuring8

 1.2.1. The need for instruction-giving8

 1.2.2. Classifications10

 1.2.3. Descriptive accounts13

 1.2.3.1. Students' interpretations of procedural structuring18

 1.2.3.2. Teaching styles in procedural structuring26

 1.2.4. Teaching guidelines30

 1.2.5. Complementary sources of information33

1.3. Topic and linguistic structuring35

 1.3.1. The nature of topic structuring35

 1.3.2. The nature of linguistic structuring37

 1.3.3. Classifications38

 1.3.4. Descriptive accounts42

 1.3.5. Teaching Guidelines45

1.4. Psychological structuring47

 1.4.1. The role of affect47

 1.4.2. Classifications48

 1.4.3. Descriptive accounts52

1.5. Synthesis56

1.6. Introduction to the study60

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. The interpretative paradigm63

 2.1.1. The role of interpretative research in teacher development65

 2.1.2. The methods of investigation in interpretative research66

2.2. Description of the study	73
2.2.1. The development of the research statement	73
2.2.2. Data collection	
2.2.2.1. Watching	77
2.2.2.2. Asking	82
2.2.2.3. Reviewing	83
2.2.2.4. The journal	84
2.2.3. Data analysis	84
2.2.4. Writing up	88
2.3. Summary	89

CHAPTER 3: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.1. The school	91
3.2. The course and the classes	93
3.3. The classrooms	94
3.4. The students	95
3.5. The teachers	98
3.6. Selection of site and participants	100
3.7. Entry to site ..	102
3.8. Summary	103

CHAPTER 4: THE TEACHER AS PROVIDER OF STRUCTURING

4.1. Preliminaries	105
4.1.1. First two levels of segmentation: tasks and stages	106
4.1.2. Third level of segmentation: the preparatory and wrap-up segments	108
4.1.3. Description of Bob's, Mark's and Sharon's general teaching styles	111
4.2. The match between teachers and students in procedural structuring	116
4.2.1. Mismatches about what to do	118
4.2.2. Mismatches about the linguistic focus and the topic of the task	129
4.3. Specific instructions and descriptions in procedural structuring	138
4.4. Fostering interaction in groups during procedural structuring	150
4.5. Chances for student decision-making in procedural structuring	155
4.6. Procedural structuring across tasks and lessons	158
4.7. Linguistic structuring	166

4.8. Topic structuring	184
4.9. Psychological structuring	199
4.10. The use of humor	219

CHAPTER 5: STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION AND INTERPRETATION IN STRUCTURING

5.1. Students' participation in public talk	225
5.2. Side-talk during structuring	244
5.2.1. Task-related side-talk	244
5.2.2. Side-talk unrelated to the task	252
5.3. Structuring and students' performances	259

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Summary and discussion of individual differences	277
6.1.1. Bob	278
6.1.2. Mark	281
6.1.3. Sharon	287
6.2. General Discussion	292
6.3. General summary	311
6.4. Implications for further research	317
6.5. Implications for teacher development	322
6.6. Methodological reflections	324

REFERENCES AND SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	331
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Field notes and handout from Mark 11/11/91	345
Appendix B: Calendar of field notes and audio recorded sessions	354
Appendix C: Number of Observations per day and teacher	355
Appendix D: Questionnaire to teachers	356
Appendix E: A sample from the interview to Bob	358
Appendix F: Level 3 syllabus	363
Appendix G: Handout from Bob's lesson on 30/4/92	366
Appendix H: More active roles for students in the structuring of language-learning tasks: some alternatives	367

Appendix I: Guiding questions for discussion and observation in teacher development	369
Appendix J: Transcription Conventions	373
Appendix K: Description of tasks and transcription of Bob's lesson on 1/4/92	377
Appendix L: Description of tasks and transcription of Mark's lesson on 23/3/92	394
Appendix M: Description of tasks and transcription of Sharon's lesson on 8/4/92	414

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List of Tables

1.	Calendar of field notes and audio recorded sessions	354
2.	Number of Observations per day and teacher	355
3.	Description of students	97
4.	Description of tasks by teacher	112
5.	Contents of specific directions and descriptions in productive skills	140
6.	Contents of specific directions and descriptions in receptive skills and language exercises	140-1
7.	Location of specific directions and descriptions	142
8.	Number of specific directions and descriptions per teacher and type of task	146
9.	Number of specific directions and descriptions of tasks related and unrelated to exam practice	147
10.	Number of previews and reviews per teacher	160
11.	Number of events in linguistic structuring per type and teacher	168
12.	Types of tasks per teacher	169
13.	Location of events in linguistic structuring	172
14.	Number of events in topic structuring per teacher and type	191
15.	Location of events in psychological structuring per teacher	201
16.	Number of events in psychological structuring related and unrelated to the final exam	204
17.	Number of events giving reassurance versus those applying pressure	210
18.	Number of students' reactions of laughter in public talk per type and teacher	240

List of Figures

1.	The initial problem statement	75
2.	Types of mismatches in procedural structuring	117
3.	Types of previews and reviews	159
4.	Types of events in psychological structuring	202
5.	Types of stimuli of laughter	233

CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Chapter 1 starts with a definition of the term "structuring" and an explanation about the interest of the present topic of research (1.1). Then the review of the literature follows and it is divided into three parts: procedural structuring (1.2.), linguistic structuring (1.3.) and psychological structuring (1.4.). Each of these sections follows the same order in the presentation of its contents. There is a theoretical introduction, followed by a presentation of categories, descriptions and interpretations from research studies. 1.2. and 1.3. finish with a section on classroom implications. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the studies reviewed (1.5.) and an introduction to the present study (1.6.).

1.1. DEFINITION OF THE TERM "STRUCTURING" AND INTRODUCTION

The areas in classroom-based research focused on the teacher

that have been more thoroughly studied in the field of ESL¹ are, according to Lynch (1990): (a) the teacher as producer of language (e.g., modifications of input, discourse adjustments and effects on comprehension, amount of talk, code switching), (b) the teacher as an elicitor/encourager of learner language (e.g., teacher questioning, use of display and referential questions, wait-time, student participation), (c) the teacher as arbiter or corrector of learner language, and (d) the teacher as explainer of language (i.e., metatalk--focus on form or content, reformulations). The present piece of research cannot be fitted into any of these four categories since it covers the area of the teacher as elicitor or organizer of language-learning tasks or activity. That is to say, the role of the teacher as one who structures language-learning tasks.

In this study the term "structuring" is used to refer to all the segments of classroom talk that set the stage for subsequent activity or bring activity to a close. The information provided or elicited during these segments is relevant for the whole activity or lesson where it is mentioned and not just the immediately preceding or subsequent utterances.

The term "structuring" has been derived from Fanselow's "structuring move" (1987), a term he borrowed from Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman and Smith (1966), although the use I make of the term is a reduction of their concept. This reduction emphasizes the opening and closing of tasks and differs from the "structuring

¹ My use of the term ESL is general and includes both the context of second and foreign language learning. Only when I want to be specific about the foreign context am I going to use EFL.

move" in two aspects:

(a) Bellack's tradition distinguishes structuring moves from soliciting, responding, reacting and bearing moves (this last one was an addition from Fanselow), whereas the meaning I give to "structuring" can include "solicits," "responses," "reactions" and "bearing" moves provided they occur during the time when students are in the process of getting introduced to an instructional task² or the task is being drawn to a close. Because of this reduction I cannot take the move as a unit, instead I talk about "structuring" in the abstract, as an uncount noun and refer to the talk that sets the long-term framework for a lesson or task mainly at their opening and close "structuring segments."

(b) Bellack's tradition also includes in the definition of "structuring move" the teacher's comments before a question and the ongoing moment-by-moment teacher comments designed to keep the lesson within bounds. I am not including this definition of the term in my use of structuring.

According to Gagné (1992), when the teacher "structures," the nature of the talk can be of a (a) procedural, (b) linguistic or (c) psychological nature.

(a) Procedural structuring

During "procedural structuring" the teacher provides students with information on the purpose and direction of the lesson or task³. An example of procedural structuring would be a teacher

² I am here using the term "task" in a broad sense and not in the more restrictive sense that the term "task" has been given in ESL as a unit of activity with differing degrees of authenticity, integration, personal involvement and decision-making demands (Crookes, 1986; Ribé, 1989).

³ I will also be using the words "directions" and "instructions" to refer to what the teacher says during "procedural structuring."

starting a task on commands by writing the words "draw, shade, darken, extend, shorten" in a column on the blackboard and then saying:

T Tonight, we're going to draw a person dancing. As you draw, I'll come around and tell you ways to change your drawings, using some of these words.

(Fanselow, 1987, p. 442)

Procedural structuring can also occur in the progress of a task as will be observed in chapter 4. It typically occurs at the start of a task but when it is not fully explained, understood or paid full attention to then, instructions need to be added, repeated or clarified later during the carrying out of a task.

(b) Linguistic Structuring

During "linguistic structuring" the teacher provides content-relevant information to assist pupils in reaching the goals established. An example would be a teacher bringing a pronunciation task to a close by saying:

T Now that you have done this exercise, you see that an -ed after a voiced sound is pronounced /d/ and after a voiceless sound is pronounced /t/.

(Fanselow, p. 443)

(c) Psychological structuring

Finally, under "psychological structuring" I include the teacher's verbal attempts to influence the students' attention or predisposition towards the lesson or a task. An example would be a teacher trying to give encouragement to students before she releases them to do a report on wombats.

T Now I'm looking forward to seeing what you write about wombats.

(Christie, 1991, p. 209)

Because of these three types of content in structuring, the present review of the literature has been accordingly divided into these three blocks. But before that, I will first reason why I have not chosen to adopt other terms that approximately also cover the concept of "structuring." Then I will go on to talk about why I find this aspect of classroom-based research worthy of study.

The concept of "structuring" I am presenting here has been used in the past by Mehan (1979) under the labels "opening" and "closing phase" but I have preferred to keep the term "structuring" without making an a priori distinction between the talk occurring before or after the instructional phase of a task. Gagné (1992) under the term "preparatory phase" covers my definition of "structuring" partially too. Even though she refers to both the talk occurring at the opening of a task as well as any supplementary talk occurring during its implementation, she does not include the talk at the close of a task. In addition, because the term "preparatory" seems to give preeminence to the talk given in anticipation to the task over the talk occurring retrospectively, I have preferred to adopt "structuring" as a superordinate term. Other authors like Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) do not have a category for this concept of structuring in their system of analysis of classroom talk. The unit called "transaction" is smaller than the term "structuring" since it is marked by frames, and there can be frames within structuring.

Now that I have defined and justified the use of the term "structuring," I will move on to expose the reasons why I find this area of study interesting to analyze under a pedagogical

perspective. I might have had little to say about the teacher's role on structuring some fifteen or twenty years ago when the teaching of English tended to follow a linear organization (introduction of concept followed by practice) and chapters in one given textbook did not offer much variety in the types of tasks (as can be told from the analysis of such popular books as First Things First [1967] or Mainline [1973]). These features made classroom work quite cyclical and (because of the recurrence of tasks) teachers did not need to go into great detail in presenting tasks.

To my view, the study of "structuring" in the language classroom is more sensible in the contemporary classroom for a number of reasons. First, similar to technical classes (Niemloy, 1988), the learning of a language today is generally regarded as a process of skill development and not simply the giving of rules or information. Under this concept of "teaching to do," procedural structuring seems to be more relevant than if teachers were only involved in "teaching to know." Secondly there is now a trend to follow a holistic organization of content, whereby the sequence of tasks in the classroom is not that predictable for students. Besides, textbooks generally present a wide variety of types of tasks. And the rich supply of commercially available supplementary material that the market offers together with some teachers' availability to photocopy material make it likely that teachers introduce a great variety of task types. These three circumstances all contribute to making the teacher as organizer of tasks gain a more central role in the language classroom.

Another reason for my interest in the structuring of language-learning tasks is that group work (in opposition to lock-step teaching) has progressively acquired prestige among teachers

(mainly through the contributions of cooperative approaches to language learning such as Cooperative Learning and Project Work) and is a feature of many classrooms today. The need to orient students to work in groups before they are released seems to be more necessary than in tasks that are teacher-led throughout. Related to this is the more recent trend in ESL to empower the learner and make him less dependent on the teacher and more able to pursue self-instruction. One way of moving towards this "autonomy" starts by sharing with students aspects of the "teaching" that had traditionally belonged exclusively to the terrain of the instructor. It makes sense to think that some of this "sharing" will also be made evident when the teacher structures activity to allow for a greater student involvement in decisions about what to do and how. Finally, recent studies focused on language learners' cognitions have made teachers aware of the strategies and processes that successful and poor learners go through when engaged in one of the four skills. It would make sense to think that teachers can make use of these insights when they talk to their students about what they are expected to do when performing a task.

All the above stated reasons motivated me to start an exploratory analysis on the topic of structuring in the context of foreign language instruction with the expectation that what happens between tasks and at the beginning and ends of lessons would be a fruitful source of information for the ESL community.

1.2. PROCEDURAL STRUCTURING

When the teacher structures a language-learning task the procedural content consists in giving instructions on how to perform the task. First of all I am going to deal with the need for instruction-giving (1.2.1.); then I will go on to present relevant classifications (1.2.2) and descriptions of learners interpreting instructions and teachers giving them (1.2.3). The last two sections are briefer. In 1.2.4., I report on recommendations from different sources that have been made as to how best to provide procedural structuring. Finally in 1.2.5., I mention neighboring areas of study outside the area of pedagogy that have dealt with this topic.

1.2.1. The need for instruction-giving

The need for instructions so that students know what they have to do in a task may vary. Sometimes a task is familiar enough for students and it requires little procedural structuring on the part of the teacher. This ritualization is seen as a positive and unavoidable trait of the classroom since it gives security to students (Prabhu, 1992, p. 228). Students are able to draw inferences in great part because of their familiarity with the setting and the materials. Fanselow (1987, p. 440) gives the example of the seat-belt in a plane. Most people will buckle it before the actual announcement. In the case of the classroom the format of a written exercise, the type of grouping, the position of the teacher in class, and the contextual cues, among others, tell learners a lot about what needs to be done and how. This is so to such an extent that sometimes students do what is expected of them in a task with minimal verbal intervention on the part of the teacher. In the

following example, without the teacher saying it explicitly, students started writing the verbs in the corresponding tenses and form:

T Bon, maintenant. D'abord, un papier, un crayon devant vous, tout le monde, on va en avoir besoin, et en plus de ça, j'écris deux verbes au tableau ((L'enseignante écrit au tableau "envoyer" et "ouvrir," et en-dessous, "futur, tu"; "passé composé, il"; etc.)), ça prend deux minutes

(Gagné, 1992, p. 104)

Similarly, in an ethnographic study involving twenty-seven elementary school classrooms, DeVoss (1982) reports that students seemed to collectively anticipate events without needing explicit instructions from the teachers. Students sensed the end of seatwork before the teacher's formal announcement to get ready to stop a task. Other studies show that some students are even used to skipping the written instructions of exercises and prefer to infer from the instructional text what they are expected to do, as the following comment from a student shows,

L Well first . . . ((Chuckle)) ((Chuckle)) I . . . I do this a lot. I look at the exercise first, and I don't read the directions. You know, lots of times there's a bunch of exercises and the directions change . . . Well, I jump right into the exercise to see if I can tell what you're supposed to do without reading the instructions.

(Hosenfeld, 1976, p. 124)

One may wonder why instructions keep being given in and outside the classroom when it appears that they are not that meaningful and often go unattended to. In the following quotation Fanselow (1987) argues that this is so because instructions have the effect of giving reassurance especially in situations which we cannot control.

Since announcements on planes usually fail to increase my knowledge about runways, altitude, or speed, they must have some other purpose. Pilots, like others responsible for groups, probably make announcements about what they are doing and about to do partly to reassure those they are responsible for. Most of us like to know what's happening, what's going to

happen, and what has happened, whether we are on a plane or in any other settings where we are not in control. (p. 430)

1.2.2. Classifications

A number of researchers have looked into what teachers say when they give instructions. Product of these observations are the following categorizations of procedural information. Gagné (1992) described teachers' instructions in a study of two experienced teachers of French as a second language to teenagers. From an analysis of fourteen lessons from these two teachers she inductively came up with a classification of the content of instructions that I present below:

- 1) Announcement of the activity: On va commencer par faire la correction.
- 2) Instructions:
 - Instructions on the nature of the activity : Lisez le paragraphe suivant.
 - Instructions on its duration: Vous avez cinq minutes.
 - Instructions on the length: Trouvez minimum dix mots.
 - Instructions on its organization: Formez équipes de deux. Jessica, tu commences.
 - Instructions on its quality: Sans fautes.
- 3) Accountability of the activity: Je donne un point pour le temps et un point pour la conjugaison.
- 4) Communication of objectives:
 - Language: L'objectif, c'est de parler.
 - Pedagogical: C'est pour forcer votre imagination à vous.

Although this classification is well-structured, it lacks detail in some respects. For example, under the category "instructions on organization" no distinction would be made between a teacher who said "Learn the words in the list" and another who said "Learn the words in the list. You could make associations." That is to say, the degree of specificity of actions that teachers give is not reflected in this classification. Neither is there any category that shows whether

the announcement includes a language focus or a topic. Consequently an announcement like "I'm going to ask some questions now" would be classified no differently from "I'm going to ask you questions about your personal lives to practice 'do' and 'does'."

Other sources of classification of procedural information are the observation schemes in ESL. Some of them do not go into any detail. FLint (Moskowitz, 1971) limits itself to identifying the category "gives directions." COLT (Allen, Frölich and Spada, 1984) makes the distinction between "management: procedural directives" and "management: disciplinary statements" but does not develop them further. Fanselow's FOCUS (1987) is the observation system that offers more detail. Similar to COLT, he makes the distinction between aspects of procedure within the area of classroom management and aspects of procedure related to task directions. Since I am not interested in purely managerial issues, I will just examine the classification for task directions:

Procedure

- 1) classroom behavior: language (pl). Words and phrases that indicate how students are to perform a task but do not refer to the time or size of the expected response (e.g., carefully, loudly, with a whisper)
- 2) difficulty factor (pd). References to the difficulty or ease of a task.
- 3) size (ps). References to the size and shape of words, sentences, sounds, or any other referents.
- 4) teaching direction: use (pu). Directions related to channel of communication used (oral, visual, linguistic, non-linguistic, paralinguistic).
- 5) teaching rationale (pr). Explanations of the reasons for following one set of teaching directions rather than another. The following is a written example from a textbook:

Text: In the following passage, some words are missing. These words are not necessary to understand the passage. You can probably read the story faster and understand the story more without the words. (Fanselow, p.439)

- 6) time/space (pe). References to how much time there is to perform a task (e.g., quickly, in three minutes) and references as to how much space it should take.
- 7) role (po). Assigning students roles (other than that of a language learner) to perform a task (i.e., You will play the role of an editor faced with space for only 100 words needed by the printer in exactly 15 minutes).
- 8) other

(pp. 130 and 438-9)

Fanselow's system does not intend to cover all possible communications in the classroom. The category "other" is there in case there are communications that do not fit into any of his categories of procedure. He encourages users of his system to develop other subcategories if they encounter them in enough number in the transcripts they code (p. 373).

What is most interesting about Fanselow's system is that it allows for more specification than that of Gagné. He realizes that procedural information can be divided into two groups: that which tends to be general and that which tends to be specific (p. 130) and his observation system makes this distinction transparent. In FOCUS, the following four communications would be coded differently:

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------|
| T | Listen carefully. | (pu) |
| T | Pay attention to the use of the passive in the text. | (pu + s: grammar) |
| T | I'll read a story for you. | (pu + s: genre) |
| T | Play the role-play as if you were on a bus. | (pu + s: context) |

The "pu" stands for a teaching direction and the "s" stands for another major type of content in this observation system, the study of language (in this case within the subcategories of grammar, genre and context). Being able to combine different types of content makes it possible to have a more detailed account about procedural

structuring, something that I found lacking in Gagné's system. Following her classification, the four communications above would be put into the same category: "directions about the nature of the activity."

However, I do not fully agree with Fanselow in the categorization he gives of the following communication:

I have a story about Malcolm X. (pu + s)

I think that the fact that the topic of the story is mentioned should also appear in the categorization, which I would code in the following way:

I have a story about Malcolm X. (pu + s:genre + f:
general knowledge)

In the scheme the "f" stands for life (content that is neither study of language nor procedure). More concretely the subcategorization here would be that of "general knowledge."

The two classifications here presented about instruction-giving (Gagné's and Fanselow's) are the two most thorough coded descriptions I have been able to come across in the literature of language learning.

1.2.3. Descriptive accounts

After having looked at two detailed classifications, I will now turn to reviewing the frequency and use of procedural structuring by teachers. In analyzing sixty-four tasks taught by the two teachers in her data, Gagné (1992) found a preeminence of procedural structuring over linguistic and psychological structuring. More than three fourths of the pedagogical events⁴ from the two

⁴ Each teacher's intervention to provide structuring is called

teachers under study belonged to procedural structuring and, importantly, most of them belonged to the categories on the nature of the activity (what to do) and its organization (how). The author points out the low number of events communicating the objective of the activity: eight in number out of two hundred and eighty devoted to giving instructions.

In the literature we find other authors that comment on the scant information that is passed onto students during procedural structuring. From the field of ESL, Hosenfeld (1976, p. 118), Nunan (in press) and Prabhu (1992, p. 228) have commented on the fact that teachers tend to share with students little of one or more of these: the curricular objectives, the methodological guidelines, and the management of learning. In his study of nine ESL teachers, Nunan (in press) has further observed that teachers tended to open up lessons by starting the first task without giving general information about the whole lesson.

Similar comments are made by researchers from a different context. Bennett and Dunne (1992) in a review of today's practices in primary schools in Britain say that teachers "are good at telling children what to do, but not at telling them why they are doing it" (p. 9). Similarly, in a research project where twenty primary school teachers were observed teaching mathematics, language, arts and craft and general studies, none of them told students in their introduction of a topic why they were doing a task. The teachers just announced what the children had to do in order to complete an assignment (Galton and Williamson, 1992, p. 87). These authors further comment that even though these twenty teachers assigned students tasks where cooperation in groups was required, none of

"pedagogical event" by several researchers (Gagné, 1992; Lloyd, 1993).

them explained how they should do so or what procedures they should adopt if problems aroused (p. 88).

This scarcity in providing procedural structure may have its causes. Nunan (in press) has pointed out that for teachers the task is a more salient unit than the lesson⁵, which would explain why teachers were observed to start lessons abruptly. Doyle (1986, p. 417) also hypothesizes that this abruptness may be the result of the teachers' fear of "losing" their students. That is to say, he admits that when students are given information about a task that is not going to be done immediately, students' involvement may decrease. Hammersley (1990, p. 21) also thinks that the teacher's style is motivated by a concern for the students' attention. For him, teachers leave students to interpret what the lesson is about as an attention-maintaining device. According to Edwards and Mercer (1988), there is also a tendency in teachers to think that students should not be told what they can learn for themselves. Maybe teachers prefer students to catch on to the information that is being missed during procedural structuring as the task progresses. Finally Galton and Williamson (1992, p. 93) think that the pressure of time to cover the syllabus can be another competing factor for this scarcity of information during structuring.

But in spite of these authors' attempts at understanding teachers' actions, there is still the belief in all the authors so far mentioned in this section (except Gagné whose study is just descriptive) that teachers should spend some time going through the processes students are expected to activate during a task. Block (in press) sees the need for providing students with what he calls

⁵ The task has also been found to be a salient unit during planning in general education (Zahorick cited in Clark and Peterson, 1986, p. 264)

"activity scaffolding" (he is referring to information about the activity—why it is done, how it relates with previous tasks etc.) in the same way as students get linguistic scaffolding (he is referring to modifications of input and interactional adjustments). But whereas linguistic scaffolding is implicit, he thinks that "activity scaffolding" should be made explicit.

These conclusions (about keeping learners more informed) have been reached mostly by looking at the effect on students' behavior and thoughts when they were introduced to tasks with little "activity scaffolding"/procedural structuring (1.2.3.1.) and by investigating teachers that differentiated themselves by the different amount of "activity scaffolding"/procedural structuring they provided students (1.2.3.2.). To these investigations I will turn in the next section. But first of all I will look at the main findings from investigations using the observational system devised by Bellack (1966), from which Fanselow's classification (1987) comes.

The late sixties and seventies saw an outburst of investigations that examined classroom interaction using the analysis system developed by Bellack et al. (1966), sometimes in association with other observational systems. In 1971 there were twenty-five studies on structuring. And up until 1980 Doenau (1987) reports around forty such studies dealing with structuring coming from different countries (Australia, Finland, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sweden and the U.S.), a number of subject matters (language, mathematics, science, civics, religion, social studies and so on) and students from primary and secondary education. These studies were mainly of two types, descriptive and process-product. Descriptive studies will be commented on here and process-product studies will be dealt with in section 1.3.4..

Bellack's analytical system is based on a four-part framework, structuring being one of these four core units, the others being soliciting, responding and reacting. The descriptive studies working on Bellack's line of research looked mainly at (a) the proportion of these four moves in relationship to structuring, (b) its immediate context (what moves followed and preceded structuring) and (c) the extent to which the teacher and students were in charge of this move. The results from the relevant research studies in this area are reproduced below from Doenau (1987):

- The structuring move was mainly done by the teacher, not the students. The study with least structuring from the teacher reported 86% and the one with most structuring reported 100%. More specifically, the halting of a task was an action exclusive to the teacher.
- Structuring moves to open a task were more frequent than those to close it. 95.4 % of the structuring moves were used to launch tasks.
- The structuring move was the least frequent of all moves. The study with the least proportion of structuring moves had a percentage of 3.9% and the one with most such moves had a percentage of 12%.
- The most common tasks announced were general oral, reporting and questioning-answering.
- The move following a teacher structuring move most frequently was a teacher question (84% of the times).
- The move following a student's structuring move most frequently was a teacher reaction (49%) followed by a teacher solicit (22%).
- Students in the "steering group" (students in the 10-25

percentile according to general ability) received fewer structuring moves than other class members.

The studies from which these results have been extracted reflect the research trends of their period. They do not go into further detail about classroom interaction once they have reached conclusions like the ones above. To have some detail, we have to look at studies from the eighties, which we now go back to.

1.2.3.1. Students' interpretations of procedural structuring

Kumaravadivelu (1991) points to ten types of sources of misunderstanding between two ESL teachers and their intermediate students, three of which have to do with procedural structuring: (a) the pedagogic, (b) the strategic and (c) the instructional.

(a) The "pedagogic source" refers to a lack of coincidence in the short or long term objectives of language-learning tasks. She cites an episode where a student mentioned punctuation as the objective of the lesson, while the teacher regarded the task as a meaning-focused activity with some attention to "too" and "enough."

(b) The "strategic source" of misunderstanding involves students following a process to complete a task that the teacher does not expect. She cites a case where the teacher expected students to do a problem-solving task through discussion and negotiation. The transcript of the students shows that there was little of that.

(c) The third source, the "instructional source," refers to the students' difficulties at interpreting tasks. We will further talk about each of these three types of mismatch in order.

The pedagogic mismatch has been observed to produce

discontent in some students. Omitting the rationale for why tasks are done, how, when etc. led a class of twelve-year-old students in Britain to dislike the ways their regular teacher managed lessons. Through responses to a Thematic Apperception Test, these students complained about the problem of "not knowing what it was learning us" (Galton and William, 1992, p. 86). They did not know what they were supposed to be learning.

In the context of a foreign language school for adults, Flock (in press) describes six students having the feeling that they did not get to do new things. According to the researcher, who was collecting naturalistic data from both these students and the teacher, this perception may have changed if the teacher had informed students about the purposes of what they were doing. In particular, there was one student in that class, Alex, who was especially discontent. Block realized that Alex had difficulty in interpreting tasks. Once he interpreted a task designed to develop listening skills in general as one where students were supposed to distinguish accents. Another misinterpretation or mismatch experienced by Alex occurred when he missed that a number of tasks they were performing were connected, as the following quotation shows:

Alex En ningún momento supimos cuál era el desenlace. Entonces nosotros haciendo ejercicios y ejercicios sin saber en ningún momento que llegaríamos a eso. . . . Quizás se hubiese planteado un principio, un final, sabiendo cuál es el final, hubiera resultado más interesante.

Block comments that his mismatches occurred either because the teacher did not mention the purposes or because the teacher's explanation was ignored by Alex.

I think it is important to note that these mismatches are sometimes general to all students in a class but most often different

students interpret tasks differently, some as intended by the teacher and others not. For example, in Block's study, unlike Alex, his classmates perceived the connection between tasks.

Another instance about the individual differences in the interpretation of classroom experiences is contributed by Marx and Winne (1987). Two students had opposing views about a teacher who used to begin lessons with an introduction that included a statement of that lesson's objective. Whereas student 1 perceived this practice as a helpful device to fit all parts of the lesson together, student 2 missed this signal and interpreted the practice as a challenge:

Researcher: Why do you think Mr. R. would want you to know what you were going to end up doing?

L1 Well, it's easier to learn when you know what you're going to make—sort of like making a model, so you first put the pieces together if you know what you're going to make first.

Researcher: Was there anything, Mike, that was different for you?

L2 Yeah, he does it all the time, and I really don't like it because it kind of scares you at the start when he goes, "This is what you're gonna do, you're gonna learn how to measure a tree and how you do it outside," and I get scared because I don't think I'm gonna be able to do that . . . it sounds so complicated to me, and I'm scared.

(p. 280)

Teachers also seem to be aware of students' differing capabilities to interpret tasks and their intents. In his thorough review of "Classroom Organization and Management," Doyle (1986, p. 408) reports on a junior high school study by Carter and Doyle where high-ability students proved to be more skilled in interpreting tasks than average-ability students and accordingly their English teacher also gave more explicit instructions in these average-ability classes than she did in high-ability classes.

As regards the strategic mismatch (misinterpreting the

process of completion), the literature from the field of ESL as well as from general education provides us with several descriptions of this phenomenon. In general, some students have the tendency to simplify tasks and make them easier. In one case, a foreign language teacher of French thought students were reading for meaning in doing a grammar exercise. Through the talk-aloud procedure, one of her junior high students, Julie, reported not to perform the task the way the teacher anticipated. She was completing the task with the minimum possible information (Hosenfeld 1976, pp. 121 and 123), that is, without reading for meaning. Similar behaviors are reported from children who modify the task "in order to eliminate those elements designed to improve the quality of the solutions but slow down the process" (Galton and Williamson, 1992, pp. 89-90). In a primary school classroom, the pupils tended to ignore the teacher's instructions when she told them first to discuss which pupil should color in various sections of a map. Instead, pupils would proceed immediately to the practical activity, assuming responsibility for the different tasks on a "first come first served basis" (Galton and Williamson, pp. 50-51). The authors further observed that when the teacher became aware of this instructional mismatch, she repeated instructions to slow down the process and that interfered with the students' objectives of completing the task as soon as possible, which students found annoying. For other examples of this type of mismatches see Galton and Williamson, p. 90; Brown, Day and Jones in Brown and Day, 1983.

I need to mention that just as I noted in the pedagogic mismatches, there are individual differences as well in the strategic mismatches. While some students are observed to be performing a

task differently from the teacher's expectations, other students have been observed to simultaneously be performing the task as intended (for example, see Bennett and Dunne 1992, p. 88)

As to the instructional source of mismatch (difficulty in the understanding of the teacher's directions), the lack of understanding of the instructions of a task seems to be attributed by some practising teachers to a lack of attention on the part of some students. In the French teachers' opinions in Gagné's study (1992), some students are "chronically inattentive" (p. 152) and others are particularly inattentive during procedural structuring (p. 120). These teachers as well as an English teacher in a junior high school in Doyle and Carter's study (1984) seemed not to like to repeat instructions. According to these latter researchers, who observed Ms. Dee, the teacher, at the beginning of the school year, it was always the same students who asked clarification questions on procedure (p. 145). And when one student asked a question, usually other questions from other students followed (p. 141). Doyle and Carter narrate Ms. Dee's behavior towards these type of questions like this:

The teacher often refused, particularly on the first day, to repeat information which had just been given. Directions were repeated for the total group as part of the initial presentation and later if the contact was fairly private. But public questions, especially by students who tended not to pay attention and frequently asked for information to be repeated, were often ignored. (p. 139)

Generally speaking, the French teachers from Gagné as well as Ms. Dee ended up repeating instructions. Ms. Dee said to the researchers that it was difficult not to repeat directions (p. 141). And, Monsieur Yvon, one of Gagné's teachers, said that repeating directions was no

good solution but the least bad one (p. 152). These teachers surrendered and repeated instructions not to lose control of the class. In my opinion, another potential reason for second language students to miss the content of instructions could be attributed to some students' poor listening skills, although this was not how the teachers in Gagné's study interpreted this phenomenon.

What teachers in these studies certainly perceived was that some of these students' clarification requests were not fully genuine but served some other purpose. Sometimes a student's question stemmed from a need to know, to be reassured that what he was doing was what he should be doing, as Madame Marielle reported (Gagné, 1992, p. 120). On other occasions through these questions there seems to be a resistance to doing a task the way the teacher intends and a covert attempt on the part of students to get some change. Gagné describes a case where students tried to get the teacher to do a grammar activity orally, an activity that was initially planned to be done in writing. The students, however, did not persuade the teacher directly but pretended they did not understand the grammar rule. Lemke (1990 p. 71) also gives evidence of science students in a secondary school who, in the guise of a clarification request ("Do we have to copy this?"), intended to override an obligation.

Doyle and Carter's study (1984) is another example where students showed some resistance towards some assignments. Students were observed to slow down the pace of work, especially during the transition to work, and request the teacher to re-explain the assignments. But this behavior was only observed in assignments that required students to exercise higher-level cognitive processes and which would later be graded. As a result of

this behavior, Ms. Dee, the teacher, who had initially presented these high order assignments as quite open, was drawn to specify requirements, thus transforming the tasks into easier ones. By contrast, students' behavior towards lower-level tasks was smoother and students asked few questions to clarify work requirements. Unlike with high order assignments, the task definition here remained stable.

I have now dealt with what might cause instructional mismatches and how teachers feel and react. What students do when faced with these mismatches is going to be the following topic in this review. The data from Gagné's study (1992) shows that students asked procedural questions to the teacher often, especially when it was a task that required productive rather than receptive involvement from students. Almost one tenth of the pedagogical events of a procedural nature in her data were initiated by the students at the opening of the task or once the activity had started (p. 114 and 147). In contrast, their teachers, Madame Marielle and Monsieur Yvon, repeated procedural information on their initiative to a lesser extent—in only thirteen out of the sixty-four tasks analyzed in the study (pp. 119 and 150).

It is important to point out, however, that Gagné (1992) only recorded the public talk of the lessons and consequently missed students turning to other students in search of procedural clarification, if they did so, and it is likely that they did. Talk between students that takes place in the margin of the official talk (talk that is audible to the teacher and the class) is called "side-talk" by Lemke (1989, 1990), "horizontal interactions" by Vásquez and Martínez (1992) and "private utterances" by Alton-Lee, Nuthall and

Patrick (1992). Alton-Lee et al. also include comments that students may make to themselves in their definition of the term and they distinguish three types of private utterances taking place in a sixth's grade teacher-fronted lesson: (1) talk related to the curriculum content (i.e., engagement with curriculum content), (2) talk related to the task (i.e., preoccupation with task organization), (3) talk that is off-task (task irrelevant talk). Their research shows (p. 56) that a lot of the talk that is unofficial is task-relevant and usually directly relevant to the curriculum content.

The academic as well as affective benefits of talk between peers has also been given credit by other authors like Claxton (1990, p. 156-7) and Bennet and Dunne (1992). These latter authors report on a study where the students working in cooperation learned to ask questions of their peers (thus, not taking up the teacher's time) when these did not require abstract thought. For Lemke (1990), side-talk has an invaluable role: "Without side-talk too many students are too often left confused, even if only for an accumulating number of small, sometimes critical moments" (p. 77). He goes as far as to say that classes with little side-talk produce a stifling one-way communication pattern while those with quite a bit of side conversation produce interesting dialogue (p. 233). The fact that most teachers allow side-talk to occur, when it is not disruptive, proves teachers generally perceive its benefits, in Lemke's opinion. However, not all teachers see it like this. Doyle and Carter (1984) report on a class where, when students turned to their peers for assistance, the teacher responded to that behavior by repeating instructions herself. Probably, in the mind of that teacher side-talk was a threat to work involvement.

According to Lemke (1990), side-talk is most frequent before

and after the official lesson and in between tasks, that is at the boundaries of beginnings and endings of tasks. To my knowledge, the analysis of students' side-talk, especially in the ESL classroom, has been neglected so far probably because of the difficulty in capturing it. Nevertheless, it seems to be a very promising area of study. More importantly, the side-talk that occurs at the beginning and end of tasks could complement what we know about structuring in the public sphere.

1.2.3.2. Teaching styles in procedural structuring

Claxton (1990, p. 156-57), among others, recommends teachers not to insist on the product, on that everything has to be completed, and to insist rather on the process of learning. But there is evidence from classroom research that not all teachers follow these guidelines. Several studies from different subject matters differentiated classrooms with a product orientation from those with a process orientation. This product or process orientation is visible in the way teachers structure tasks. Cobb, Wood, Yackel and McNeal (1992) show how two mathematics third-grade teachers presented the subject matter differently. Whereas one presented mathematics as an activity consisting of following procedural instructions without understanding, the other presented mathematics as a meaningful experience where understanding of the subject matter was co-constructed. In the first of these two teachers' classes, the authors claim that this product orientation is evident by the way that teacher structured tasks (by making frequent use of the utterance "What I want you to . . ." (p.585)⁶ as

⁶ I think "What I want you to . . ." is a set formula many teachers use to give directions. Because its use is so widespread and formulaic I would be

well as by the fact that students in that class seemed to be overconcerned about fulfilling the teacher's expectations and figuring out what they had to do.

Galton and Williamson (1990) also report on two teachers' presentation styles that stand out as one (Jean's) being more process oriented than the other (Norma's). The following are two excerpts from the introduction of Jean and Norma to the same lesson where students are going to make a timing device. Jean's introduction focused on the way students were expected to work together (a process orientation) whereas Norma's focused on the making of the device (a product orientation).

Jean We have talked about fair testing before in our experiments. For this it is no good doing a one off and saying it's finished. You've got to test it and see if your device is accurate. Is it as accurate as it was the first time? Was the first result a freak? So test it. If you get finished within this lesson, I mean some of you might do it really quickly, others might never get anything ready that is going to work and will work for two minutes. Remember it's not getting it done that's really the important thing. It's not making a device that's the important thing. It's the talking and working together and planning it out and testing your apparatus. That's the really important thing and trying things out and getting your ideas across. OK. Don't just do things and then ignore the others.

(p. 95)

Norma When I was thinking about this I thought two minutes is a nice time. You have got a tray of resources here. You have got plastic bottles, candles, lots of things in there. You don't have to use them all, select the ones that you think might work best to create your timer. Each group has the same tray of resources. Over there is a communal area where we have got extra bottles, coloured water, more plasticine, rubber bands, funnels, sugar. One thing can I just ask you. Don't ask me if this is right and don't ask me what I think because in my head I have got a real idea of how I would make the timer and what I don't want to do is tell you how to do it. I want you to think of it. Create it yourselves. You will be working in your groups of twos and threes. Don't dive in and get cracking straight away. Discuss it at length and see what you have got in your tray and then start to apply the task.

(pp. 95-96)

careful to ascribe its use to a product orientation on the part of a teacher.

A procedure that Jean was also observed to use was to "break down the processes involved into smaller units and to devise structured tasks to illustrate the value of each component, so that children come to understand that the process is as important as the outcome" (Galton and Williamson, p. 94).

Then teachers were also observed to give presentations of tasks that contradicted their own actions during their performance. One such example comes from Norma who said:

Norma Right, listen, stop a minute. Before you start I am not going to come round for the first couple of minutes. I'll let you get talking to each other. I don't want to interfere so what I want you to do is to talk. Don't come to me. I'll just stand and watch and then come to you later as you have got into it.

(Galton and Williamson, 1992, p. 100)

Norma initiated a dialogue with students only thirty seconds after the above instructions that the pupils were to spend time discussing the task to each other. In their review of the literature Bennett and Dunne (1992, p. 9) also comment on contradictions between the teachers' presentation of tasks and the way these were later assessed: Some teachers presented tasks as process-oriented but evaluated them following product-oriented guidelines.

There is also some evidence that teachers' presentation styles change across time. At the beginning of the year Jean stressed to the children the importance of group processes (the sharing of ideas and listening to each other) However, as the year progressed, Jean appeared to assume that there was little need to reinforce those issues and gradually placed more emphasis on the outcomes and less on the process (Galton and Williamson, pp. 94-5).

The teacher's presentational style seems to affect how students go about performing tasks according to studies in general education. Product-oriented teachers are more likely to have

product-oriented students as well (students concerned about outperforming others and achieving success). Process-oriented teachers are likely to have process-oriented students (students concerned about acquiring new skills, about the process of learning, about using effort). In addition, there seems to be a relationship between goal orientation and strategy use. Ames and Archer (1988) found that capable high school students who rated their classrooms as process-oriented reported using more learning strategies than peers who rated their classrooms as product-oriented. However, Doyle (1986, p. 417) recognizes that in classrooms where there is a strong pressure on grades this emphasis on completion and products is only natural and hard to avoid.

Another area of description has been the relating of teachers' behaviors with their beliefs. In line with existing evidence from general education (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell and Lloyd, 1991), Boostrom (1991) argues that the classroom rules that teachers implement (one of these rules having to do with classroom work) reflect their ideas about teaching and learning. He cites the example of a seventh-grade history teacher who began her class by saying, "OK, let's get started. You will need a marker, pen, pencil, or whatever you use to highlight" (pp. 204-205). The author says that this beginning implies ideas about knowledge and its transmission:

This teacher's rules . . . imply the expectation that students will memorize and be able to recall "all important words and phrases." . . . The rules suggest that the teacher believes students can master the facts by focusing on them and that this kind of mastery is worthwhile. A claim about what the students ought to learn and how they can learn it is implied by the rules about markers and highlighting. (pp. 204-205)

In the field of ESL, Woods (1991, p. 16) reports on a similar case where links are drawn between a teacher's style in opening

tasks and his view towards content. This teacher sometimes purposefully avoided mentioning the particular focus of the lesson on the basis of a holistic view on the organization of content (whereby knowledge about language was not a prerequisite to being able to use it).

1.2.4. Teaching guidelines

There is a branch in educational research starting in the late seventies that has focused on effective teachers with the aim of finding out what they do that makes them different from other teachers. Once these features have been identified, the training of teachers with those "effective" teaching practices theoretically results in increased learning outcomes. Although this type of research has been discredited by a sector of the educational community (mainly for its prescriptive nature), some of the practices that their researchers recommend are related to procedural structuring and will be mentioned here (extracted from Emmer, Evertson and Anderson, 1980; Berliner and Rosenshine, 1987; Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986:

When effective teachers teach, they:

- Give clear and detailed instructions.
- Begin lessons with a short statement of goals.
- Begin lessons with a short review of previous, prerequisite learning.
- Model procedures they want their students to follow.
- Make sure students are aware of the links between tasks.
- Are clear about how they want their students to approach an activity (memorizing, getting the gist, being able to explain)

The applicability of all these features to ESL should be taken with caution for two reasons mainly:

- (a) Rosenshine and Steven point out that some of their recommendations are more adequate for subjects that consist of the mastery of a body of knowledge (e.g. vocabulary and grammar) than for subjects that consist in less identifiable concepts (e.g. the development of the four skills).
- (b) The research on effective teaching is based on the study of disadvantaged younger children, and it cannot be easily transferred to other populations or contexts.

In spite of these limitations, Rosenshine and Stevens (1986, p. 378) claim that these findings can be generalizable to students of all ages and abilities during their first stages of instruction.

Recommendations from other sources are offered summarily below since they have been underlying beliefs in many of the research studies presented in section 1.2.

From the point of view of cognitive psychology, Claxton (1990) suggests that teachers should be skilled at thinking out loud and should stress processes over products. Contrarily to some of the guidelines in "effective teaching," he sees no harm in having teachers leave some ambiguity in their instructions so that learners learn to figure tasks out for themselves.

Researchers on cooperative approaches to children are of the belief that learners should be given some instruction on how to cooperate with each other. They also believe that emphasis should be drawn to the process at the start of tasks (Bennett and Dunne, 1992; Galton and Williamson, 1992).

In the field of ESL, and probably under the influence of a process syllabus (Breen, 1987) , several researchers (Block, in press; Hosenfeld, 1976; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Malamah-Thomas, 1987; Nunan, in press; Prabhu, 1992) recommend teachers to start sharing with students their teaching objectives, their methodological guidelines and information about the management of learning. Block (in press) defends this position on the basis that learners are constantly trying to make sense and interpret classroom instruction. Authors following a strict process syllabus do not limit themselves to recommend a transparency in the teacher's actions and decisions. They advocate involving the learner in decision making so that the responsibility for procedural structuring is not asymmetrical.

On a purely exploratory strand, Fanselow (1987) encourages teachers to discover their own patterns of structuring procedure and try to break them by introducing and concluding tasks in ways they are not used to. So to the teacher who only structures procedure at the opening of tasks, he suggests reducing or duplicating it at its close. To the teacher who always gives instructions orally, he would suggest trying another medium. To the teacher who frequently gives very detailed and clear accounts about what students are expected to do, he would probably propose to him to be less detailed and clear and then observe what happens as a result.

One can also find in the market books especially addressed to beginning non-native teachers with lists of sample phrases with sections related to procedural structuring, thus familiarizing the reader with this type of teacher talk (Hughes, 1981; Salaberri, 1993; Willis, 1981).

1.2.5. Complementary sources of information

In the process of finding information that would be relevant for my line of research (which has a pedagogical orientation in mind), I came up with articles from other fields touching upon the topic of procedural structuring. This literature has not directly contributed to my study, but a brief mention is going to be made of it because it has provided complementary background information.

Several authors have looked at instruction giving or related areas from the fields of analysis of discourse and language acquisition⁷. In the context of primary and secondary education, Reynolds (1990) looked at the distribution of power encoded in openings and closings of tasks. Dorr-Bremme (1990) investigated the contextual cues at the boundaries of teaching events. Heyman (1986) and Poole (1990) examined the treatment of topic and the structural properties of procedural structuring respectively. Heap (1992) examined turn taking at the beginning of a reading lesson when the teacher was giving instructions. Finally, Holmes (1983) came up with a classification of the forms of directives used by teachers.

In the context of university education, Poole (1992) looked at the cultural norms and beliefs encoded in openings and closings of tasks. Fox (1993) included in her conversational analysis the openings and closings of tutoring sessions. And Niemloy (1988) and Young (1994) examined the syntax and discourse organization of lectures.

From the perspective of language development, several

⁷ I am not making any distinction between the terms "learning," "acquisition" and "development."

authors (e.g., Allen et al. 1984, p. 237; Ellis 1984 pp. 122-125; Gagné p. 117 among others) have commented on the fact that the teacher talk in procedural structuring has characteristics that make it particularly suitable to facilitate learning development within the framework of a communicative approach.

Finally, and less directly related to the topic of procedural structuring, we find studies of NS-NS and NS-NNS interactions dealing with direction-giving and requests (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Kasper, 1989; Myers Scotton and Bernstein, 1988; Schinke-LLano, 1986).

1.3. TOPIC AND LINGUISTIC STRUCTURING

Sometimes teachers accompany their introductions and closings of tasks with some topic or linguistic information that is meant to facilitate the task or make it more meaningful. First the rationale behind topic and linguistic structuring will be considered (1.3.1). Then classifications compiled from direct observations of teachers will be presented (1.3.2), a section which is followed by descriptive accounts of topic and linguistic structuring (1.3.3). In 1.3.4, there is a compilation of suggestions to provide this type of structuring.

1.3.1. The nature of topic structuring

One major change in language teaching methodology in the eighties and early nineties according to McDonough and Shaw (1993) has been the viewing of the productive and receptive skills as a process rather than as a product. Teaching manuals all stress that tasks in these four skills should not evaluate learners but develop in them the corresponding skill, thus the teacher takes on a facilitator role. In part, this change in view has been caused by the realization that classroom tasks should, to some extent, reflect authentic communication in non-teaching settings.

The language that is produced in non-teaching settings characterizes itself because of its embeddedness in a context and a purpose. Context consists of a number of features which, according to Brown and Yule (1983), are: Addresser, addressee, place, time, genre (expectations from the identification of a generic event), topic and co-text (what precedes a particular event). Contextual knowledge drastically shapes our writing and speaking. For

example, as a result of a change in the addressee my shopping list will be somewhat different depending on whether it is to be read by a member of my family who knows what brand and size of products I usually buy or by a supermarket attendant that does not know me. Changes in the setting where a conversation takes place also affect the way we talk. A family conversation at dinner will be sensitive to whether they are at home or at a restaurant. In ESL the awareness in the importance of context is reflected in the introduction of the concept of "communicative competence" by Hymes as the ability to use and interpret language appropriately in relation to social context. In the classroom such competence can be developed if productive tasks are accompanied by rich contextual information that teachers draw their students' attention to and assess them accordingly.

Having access to the context also facilitates interpretation when native users of a language read and listen. They do not rely on processing every word or do not try to interpret the literal meaning of utterances. From the research on schema theory we know that the reader and listener, if aware of context, bring to a text stereotypical knowledge of different types (e.g., content schema, formal schema) from which they can build on expectations. If, when reading and listening in the L1, context plays such a determinant role, it does not seem fair to make language learners face the already difficult task of reading and especially listening to a second language without benefiting from the advantages of context. Knowing that a paragraph that we are about to read comes from an academic magazine, a pamphlet from a play or the cover of a compact disk will raise expectations in the language learner which will probably ease his reading of the text.

As a result of both a concern in developing (rather than testing) skills, and of the importance given to context and the role of schema theory, teacher trainers and practitioners have come to stress preparing learners before they speak, write, read and listen. Richards (1983) wrote the following about listening:

The amount of preparation the learner is given prior to a listening task is often important in giving a teaching rather than a testing focus to an activity. Prelistening activities generally have this purpose. They activate the learner's script and set a purpose for listening. They may take the form of discussion, questions, or a short paragraph to read which creates the script, providing information about the situation, the characters, and the events. Activities which teach rather than test may require much more use of pre-listening tasks and tasks completed as the students listen, than post-listening tasks. (p. 234)

Although Richards talks about preparatory tasks (whole tasks devoted to pre-listening or pre-reading), the preparation can be less thorough and be reduced to short contextual warm-ups that the teacher sets up between the time a task finishes and the following gets started. These warm-ups, which I call "topic structuring," are always immediately preceded or followed by procedural structuring and they have the aim of providing meaning-oriented information relevant to the task students are being introduced to.

1.3.2. The nature of linguistic structuring

Formal instruction can be given at various places in a lesson: (1) while a task is being performed through corrections, (2) in tasks exclusively devoted to the presentation/introduction of a linguistic item and (3) during structuring. It is this last case that is of interest to us here, the case when teachers give formal instruction when

they introduce or bring a task to an end.

Teachers can preempt a task by directing some attention to form before students actually start with its performance. In bringing a task to an end, teachers can also draw attention to form by commenting retrospectively on some property of a linguistic item that came up during the performance of a task. These types of interventions on the part of the teacher, I refer to as "linguistic structuring" and theoretically they could take various forms: presentations, examples, modelling and feedback sessions, among others. They could also be interactive or in the form of a monologue.

A growing body of research from second language acquisition is strengthening the case for the introduction of formal instruction in the classroom according to Ellis (1994). Meanwhile, the case for no instruction at all (Krashen's theory, 1982, 1985) is being weakened. If teaching practices are being informed by this research, one would expect that teachers would include a linguistic component in their teaching, more specifically when they structure tasks.

1.3.3. Classifications

I am going to report classifications from three studies where the researchers observed a number of teachers introduce tasks, and from there constructed a classification of the types of topic and linguistic structuring in the repertoire of those teachers.

In her observations of two teachers, Gagné (1992) was able to identify nine subcategories. Two of them introduced students to the topic of the task (i.e., anticipation strategy, contextualization strategy), while the others were several pedagogical strategies (i.e.,

defining, explaining, illustrating, asking questions etc.) that provided a linguistic preparation. Here are the categories with some examples:

- 1) Anticipation strategy: For example before reading a text, the teacher elicits from the students hypotheses over its content from the title.
- 2) Contextualization strategy: For example before the viewing of a movie, the teacher presents the different characters.
- 3) Definition: "Bouleversée," c'est quand t'as beaucoup d'émotions.
- 4) Illustration by means of an example:

T	Donne-moi un exemple.
S	Tu dormais bien quand le grand ours noir est entré dans la tente.
- 5) Explanation: "Elle a raccroché le téléphone." Mais elle était bouleversée. Donc, elle a entendu quelque chose au téléphone qui l'a bouleversée."
- 6) Indice: "Je vais vous donner une façon de savoir quand c'est l'imparfait, quand c'est le passé composé. Quand c'est une action répétitive, (...) il y des mots-clés pour ça: "toujours, jamais"
- 7) Activation of knowledge: For example before correcting an exercise on subject-verb concord, the teacher elicits from the students the rules of grammar that have to be used.
- 8) Performance of part of the activity: For example before the beginning of an individual exercise on "le passé composé," the teacher does the first sentences for the students.
- 9) Vocabulary exploitation: For example, before the reading of a novel titled "Le reveille-matin," the teacher presents words and expressions that are thematically related to the book.

(p. 75-76)

Gagné does not always give definitions for her categories. Instead, she illustrates them through one or two examples. This is enough for most of them, although in a few cases I feel a need for explanations. For example, in the category "activation of knowledge" it is not clear whether it just includes knowledge about the target language or it also includes knowledge about the world.

In a very different context (tutoring sessions at the university level in the domains of chemistry, physics, math and computer

science), Fox (1993) describes several teacher behaviors related to topic and linguistic structuring (the author calls them "stages of contextualization") in tutoring sessions that were organized around solving particular problems. These stages of contextualization took place between the reading of a problem statement and the solving of the problem.

- 1) Making sure students understood what the problem was asking for.
- 2) Relating concepts in the problem as well as to other concepts students knew.
- 3) Helping the student project what a reasonable answer should be before the problem was calculated.
- 4) Clarifying technical terms.
- 5) Commenting on the similarity or difference of the problem at hand with previous ones.

There is a third study in the literature of general education that analyzes topic and linguistic structuring in reading (Lloyd, 1993). More precisely this study looks into the pedagogical events "designed to facilitate those processes which activate and connect a reader's prior understanding with ideas from text, or develop background ideas" (p. 27). In observing twenty-five intermediate-grade reading lessons, Lloyd analyzed the preparation students received before reading. She identified four major categories and nine subcategories:

Background knowledge:

- Providing/asking for title/topic
- Focusing on text genre
- Asking for students' knowledge/experience
- Providing background information
- Aligning with characters

Vocabulary:

- Pronunciation only; no meaning-based practices
- Meaning-based practices

Purpose Setting:

- Setting purposes

Predicting/previewing:**Predicting/previewing**

It is not possible to draw close comparisons between the three classifications (Gagné's, Fox's and Lloyd's) because of the different contexts of the studies (different levels of education, different subject matters, teaching conditions and L1/L2 teaching). However, the category of vocabulary exploitation appears in the three studies. Gagné's and Lloyd's, both being language lessons, bear further elements in common. The teachers in the two studies made use of the following practices: providing/asking for title/topic, providing background information, vocabulary and predicting/previewing. The difference in the two contexts of the studies explains the fact that the other three types of practices identified by Lloyd (focusing on text genre, aligning with characters, setting purpose) did not appear in Gagné's data. In Lloyd's study the observations were reading lessons, where this type of pedagogical events are more likely to be referred to than in a general language course, as was the case in Gagné's study, where there is a variation of receptive and productive activity. In Gagné's classification there are more categories related to the "study of the language" (linguistic structuring), somewhat predictable being that they are foreign language lessons. What is true for the three studies is that the groups of teachers observed had a significant repertoire of strategies for topic and linguistic structuring: nine in Gagné's and Lloyd's studies and five in Fox's study.

One last observation about Gagné's and Lloyd's classifications is in order: The non-existence of a category where the teacher gives personal information related to the topic at hand. Fanselow (1987) thinks that this would make structuring sound less impersonal and

would probably contribute to making it more memorable for students. He comes up with this excerpt as an illustration:

T I'm going to try to read the way Walter Cronkite reads.
I watch the six o'clock news on Channel 5 and then I
switch to Walter Cronkite on Channel 2 at seven o'clock.
I've been watching him for years. (p. 434)

1.3.4. Descriptive accounts

In spite of the range of categories in the three classifications for topic and linguistic structuring, which is notable, Gagné (1992) comments on their low frequency of appearance in her *Jata* and LLoyd (1993) comments that the cognitive involvement of most instructional events is low.

In Gagné there were only seventeen tasks which contained linguistic structuring against forty-seven with no such structuring and in those seventeen most of the structuring was linguistic rather than topical (87% versus 13%).

However, focus on two aspects of these figures help show that teachers may have given more linguistic structuring than these percentages reveal. First, Gagné did not look at the differences between the two teachers. If we do, we will see that Monsieur Yvon gave considerable more linguistic structuring than Madame Marielle. Marielle only did so in four out of a total of thirty-three tasks while Monsieur Yvon gave topic or linguistic structuring in thirteen out of a total of thirty-one tasks. Secondly, the low amount of this type of structuring may be due to the fact that Gagné did not look at whether the teachers did some type of structuring at the end of tasks. That could have raised the amount of topic and linguistic scaffolding the teachers provided at the boundaries of

tasks. Instead, the author attributes the low frequency of this type of structuring only to the fact that teachers used whole tasks (not just their introductions) to draw students' attention to language properties or the topic in preparation for a subsequent task:

En effet, toutes les activités de production orale et d'interaction orale, les exercices écrits, les tests, de même que la majorité des devoirs, sont précédés d'activités préparatoires dont le contenu linguistique facilite la réalisation des tâches subséquentes. (p. 107)

Similarly, in a study on the teaching of writing to children (one-third of whom were second language learners) Christie (1991) found out that the instructional structuring students were getting was mostly about the topic and not about how to write, which incidentally was what they were supposed to be taught.

In order to find out the extent topic and linguistic structuring facilitated students' cognitive involvement, Lloyd (1993) further examined each event and graded it from level one to level three of potential involvement. Level one designated the least amount of potential involvement and level three the most. Here is an example from one subcategory within the background knowledge category:

Providing background information

Level one: Teacher gives brief statement about story idea(s).

No or very little connection to any other ideas or to students' ideas/experiences is made.

Level two: Teacher asks questions that remind students of previous and related story. Or teacher provides background information that misses the main theme of the story.

Level three: teacher provides her own related experiences.

She either elaborates on this information or relates/facilitates students relating these ideas to other experiences/lessons. (p. 28)

The results showed that a considerable number of instructional

strategies were at levels one and two, which would potentially lead to low levels of cognitive involvement. LLoyd attributed this phenomenon to the teachers' belief in a skills/words approach to reading instead of a constructivist approach, the theoretical basis upon which the study lay. Another interpretation could be that teachers did not elaborate because these pedagogical events were not pursuing the activation of knowledge but were just devices to ensure the students' involvement.

In Bellack's research tradition, effort was put into finding out whether there was a correlation between the amount of structuring and learning outcomes in students. With that aim in mind, they identified a number of behaviors that are specific manifestations of structuring moves. Some of them had to do with the treatment of topic such as reviewing, recapitulating, terminal structure (near the end of a lesson adding new content-relevant information), cueing (calling attention to important problems). Other behaviors had to do with the presentation of procedure such as voice modulation, stating goals, giving a clear presentation, providing transitions. Some of these studies used observers' ratings of the teacher's mode of beginning and ending a lesson. Others were experimental and teachers were to teach either a high-structured lesson (by using some of the above behaviors) or a low-structured lesson (by not using the above behaviors). In a 1973-review of these process-product studies (Rosenshine and Furst, cited in Doneau, 1987), significant relationships were found between some structuring variables (number of lecturing seconds before questioning, emphasis on verbal markers of importance, terminal structuring and reviewing at the end of lessons) and learning outcomes. No

significant relationships were found between these other structuring variables: pre-question, postquestion, recapitulation at the beginning of the lesson. Roscnschine and Furst, however, thought some caution had to be drawn to the validity of their conclusions since some terms from different authors reviewed lacked precise definitions.

In a later review of process product studies, Doenau (1987) shows that results are mixed. In some (e.g., Feterson, 1977) the behaviors manifested in a high structured treatment did not result in significantly higher performance nor in a change in the students' attitude. In one of them, the significance was even in the opposite direction: High-ability students showed a strong increase of achievement in the vocabulary measure under a low structure treatment (Corno, 1979). Other studies showed significant positive relationships between some behaviors related to structuring and achievement (Borg, 1975; Dunkin, 1978; Dunkin and Doenau, 1980; Nuthall, 1974). However, Nuthail (1987) points out that some studies where students actively participated in reviewing and recapitulating (instead of just hearing the teacher review or recapitulate) or where they were made aware of the teacher's structuring, showed stronger positive correlations with measures of achievement.

1.3.5. Teaching guidelines

The following are some teaching recommendations for topic and linguistic structuring suggested by a number of authors (Albuquerque, 1990; Brophy, 1987; Fanselow, 1987; Harmer, 1983; Lindström, 1990; McDonough and Shaw, 1993). Some are only valid

for receptive skills while others are also valid for productive skills. Some of them have already appeared in the classifications above and others are mentioned here for the first time.

- Being specific in giving context: For example, instead of just giving a context, the proposal is to characterize this context. For instance, in the case of a role-play that would entail not simply saying that it takes place in a bus, but also adding that the bus is crowded, hot, has no seats and is running late (Fanselow, 1987, p. 295).
- Relating the topic of a task to students' or the teacher's own experience.
- Relating the topic of a task with students' existing knowledge.
- Predicting topic from title, visuals, word lists.
- Reading through comprehension questions before reading the text.
- Showing new language briefly.
- Giving advance organizers (i.e., statements or illustrations that characterize the activity in general terms).
- Using the think aloud procedure when modelling (so students can observe the teacher's information-processing strategies).
- Leaving students time to browse reading texts with the hope that during this time students will generate reactions.

1.4. PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURING

1.4.1. The role of affect

Theory and research have led us to the conviction that the affective component in language learning is an important factor. It is probably as important as the cognitive component for some learners in certain contexts (Gardner, 1985). It is generally accepted that when learners are receptive—a permanent or temporary openness of the mind to the experience of learning (Allwright and Bailey, 1991)—they get the most from the learning experience (for example, see Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, 1982, 1985). Under the label "receptive" Allwright and Bailey (1991) include attention, self-esteem, anxiety and motivation. In language classrooms we may find unreceptive attitudes from learners which may be partly influenced by these two contextual factors:

- The classroom may, for some learners, be a setting that raises their defensive attitudes. Such features as having to speak in front of an audience or being exposed to corrections and comments may be stressful for some learners.
- The experience of learning a second language can be more anxiety-inducing than other subjects where the language of communication is the L1. Not being able to express one's own individuality in the L2 can produce negative effects on students. This is because learning a language is not only an intellectual but also an emotional exercise.

These two factors are extrinsic to the learner, and much of the learner's receptivity stems from personal or internal factors (e.g., there are people that are more likely to feel anxious than others).

Still and to a limited extent, the teacher in collaboration with students can create a classroom atmosphere/climate where especially task-oriented receptivity is generally enhanced. Out of a concern for affective variables, there are two methods in ESL, Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1978) and Counselling Learning (Curran, 1978; Rardin and Tranel, 1988), that give preeminence to building up an atmosphere conducive to learning. In communicative classrooms this concern has led teachers to the introduction in their lessons of humanistic tasks as well (Moskowitz, 1978).

It is possible that teachers can also enhance positive reinforcement in students without following a specific approach or without setting up tasks with that primary purpose. Teachers may do so indirectly and directly. A facilitating affective climate is also influenced by indirect factors that are pervasive in the course of a lesson, such as the teacher's facial expression or tone of voice, the seating arrangement, the use of humor, the teacher's rapport with students etc. Teachers may try to give encouragement and set up a low anxiety environment through direct statements like "I am sure that you will find this exercise easy"; "Don't worry if you don't know all the words."

This section on psychological structuring is devoted to this second type of teachers' interventions, those that are direct explicit appeals to reinforcement occurring at the opening and closing of tasks.

1.4.2. Classifications

Two studies have been identified in the literature that look at teachers' motivational statements at the start of a task, one from

the context of ESL (Gagné, 1992) and the other from general education (Brophy, Rohrkemper, Rashid and Goldberger, 1983).

Gagné found eight types of statements seeking to have an effect on the attitude of the students:

- 1) Reference to the ease or difficulty of the activity: Vous allez écrire les mots de vocabulaire en même temps qu'on va les faire ensemble, il y en a beaucoup que vous connaissez.
- 2) Use of humor: C'est clair (...)? parce que là, si c'est tellement clair, je voudrais mettre une petite difficulté, hein? C'est trop facile! Quand c'est clair puis on comprend tout!
- 3) Reference to the importance of the activity: Puis c'est des mots qu'on peut demander à un prochain petit test qui s'en vient bientôt ou en même temps c'est important aussi, très important, comprendre les expressions.
- 4) Mention of the interest of the activity: Je pense que c'est un sujet qui va vous intéresser.
- 5) Use of students' personal experience: For example, before the viewing of a movie about hockey, the teacher asks which students have ever played this sport.
- 6) Use of effect of surprise: Là, vous m'avez assez entendu (...) aujourd'hui vous allez écouter d'autres voix.
- 7) Use of sanctions: Etant donné qu'on va (...) presque donner les réponses aujourd'hui, ceux qui ne me donnent pas un bon travail demain (...) après l'école, deux heures et quarante-cinq, on fera des séances de travail ensemble.
- 8) Advice: Il y a un petit problème de travail et d'effort.

(p. 78)

The other study (Brophy et al, 1983) analyzed the psychological structuring in the context of an investigation about teachers' expectations: The expectations about classroom tasks communicated by their teachers in the process of presenting these tasks. The study involved six teachers teaching math and reading lessons in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades in the U.S.. The researchers visited each teacher from eight to fifteen times. The approach taken by these researchers differs from others presented so far in that they went into the classrooms with a list of predefined categories (eighteen in all), instead of having these emerge from the data. The unit of analysis is the belief, attitude or expectation communicated

by the teacher, which the researchers generically call "statements." The categories they propose are classified into positive, negative and neutral as regards the characteristics of the task itself or its consequences. The classification has got eight positive statements, five negative, and five neutral statements.

Neutral statements

- 1) None: teacher launches directly into the task with no introduction.
- 2) Cues effort: teacher urges students to work hard.
- 3) Continuity: teacher notes relationship between this task and previous work students have done.
- 4) Time reminder: teacher reminds students that they only have limited time to get the assignment done.
- 5) Challenge/goal setting: teacher sets some goal or challenges the class to try to attain a certain standard of excellence.

Positive statements

- 6) Recognition: teacher promises that students who do well on the task will be recognized with symbolic rewards.
- 7) Extrinsic reward: teacher promises reward for good performance.
- 8) Teacher personalizes: teacher expresses personal beliefs or attitudes directly, or tells the students about personal experiences that illustrate the importance of this task.
- 9) Teacher enthusiasm: teacher indirectly expresses his or her own liking for this type of task.
- 10) Self actualization value: teacher suggests that students can develop knowledge or skill that will bring pleasure or personal satisfaction.
- 11) Survival value: teacher points out that students will need to learn these skills to get along in life or in our society as it is constructed presently.
- 12) Personal relevance: teacher tries to tie the task to the personal lives or interests of the students
- 13) Cues positive expectation: teacher states directly that the students are expected to enjoy the task or to do well on it.

Negative statements

- 14) Threats/punishment: teacher threatens negative consequences for poor performance.
- 15) Accountability: teacher reminds students that the work will be carefully checked or that they will be tested on the

material soon.

- 16) **Embarrassment**: teacher tries to show the importance of the task but does this in a negative way, indicating that they are likely to be embarrassed at some time in the future.
- 17) **Apology**: teacher apologizes for foisting this task on them.
- 18) **Cues negative expectation**: teacher indicates directly that the students are not expected to like the task or to do well on the task.

It may catch the reader's attention to see that both Gagné's and Brophy et al.'s classifications include a category about the use of the teacher's and students' experiences (category number five in Gagné and numbers nine and twelve in Brophy et al.) while this was a category under topic structuring in Lloyd (1993). Gagné punctually informs the reader about the problem she encountered in deciding the purpose of some pedagogical events in the process of her analysis. In case of doubt, she always chose a primary purpose of the event. More specifically, she explains that the category "use of students' personal experiences" could have two objectives: providing topic or providing psychological structuring. The use of this category by the teachers in the study was not elaborated enough to be regarded as topic preparation.

Another feature that the two classifications have in common is the existence of some negative statements. These statements must have the purpose of raising in the students a type of anxiety called "facilitating anxiety" (Allwright and Bailey, 1991), probably under the assumption that some students under some kind of psychological pressure might be more receptive to the task being presented.

In spite of the commonalities above stated, some differences in the type of categories of the two classifications are revealing of the different contexts of the studies. Some categories in Brophy et

al.'s work reveal that the study involved children (e.g., recognition, extrinsic rewards) in a context where evaluation was important (e.g., accountability), categories that do not appear in Gagné's classification. In addition, Brophy et al. based their analysis on the observation of more teachers than Gagné, something that would partly explain why her classification includes fewer categories.

1.4.3. Descriptive accounts

The results from the two studies show major differences in the teachers' use of psychological structuring. As regards the amount of psychological structuring, in Gagné's study only thirty-six percent of the tasks included such events, whereas in Brophy et al.'s seventy percent of the tasks included psychological statements (116 out of a total of 165 tasks). This difference could be due to the age difference of the students in the two studies, the younger learners receiving more psychological structuring. Gagné also says that in the interviews the teachers revealed that it was in the planning stages of teaching that they were most concerned with students' motivation (e.g., by looking for variety, by including revision tasks). Therefore, these teachers tended not to rely solely on the opening of the task to offer psychological support. Only in tasks that the teachers knew were unpopular to students did teachers offer that psychological support at their opening (i.e., grammar rules, written exercises on verbs and homework)⁸.

However, after a closer look at the frequency counts of the

⁸ The teachers used other less overt devices when they knew students would not be motivated by a task. Gagné (p. 136) talks about a teacher who, acknowledging students' dislike for tests, managed to present one without saying the word "test." Instead he gave students other type of information that allowed students to induce what the true nature of the task was.

two teachers in Gagné's study, a considerable difference in the amount of psychological structuring provided by the two teachers emerges. Madame Mariele provided psychological support only in eight out of her thirty-three tasks. In contrast, Monsieur Yvon had a similar number of tasks with psychological support as without support (fifteen with and sixteen without).

As regards the orientation of the statements (positive /neutral/ negative), in Gagné's research the majority of them were of a positive nature, whereas the teachers in Brophy et al.'s only gave positive statements in one-fourth of the tasks. Two of the positive categories in their predefined classification were never used by any of the six teachers (8. teacher personalizes and 10. self actualization value). This finding is not surprising in the light of the results from classroom climate studies carried out in the late fifties and sixties in the U.S.. These studies (most of which made use of Flanders' FIAC, 1970) came up with the same finding—that most American classrooms were affectively neutral (although the correlation between positive affect and achievement is complex [Soar and Soar, 1987]). In the eighties, Goodlad (1984) reported a similar picture in a major project involving the observation of more than a thousand elementary, junior and senior high school classrooms in the early eighties :

[the] relationship between teachers and classes of students was almost completely devoid of outward evidences of affect. Shared laughter, overt enthusiasm, or angry outbursts were rarely observed. Less than 3% of classroom time was devoted to praise, abrasive comments, expressions of joy or humor, or somewhat unbridled outbursts such as "wow" or "great."
(pp. 229-230)

Besides looking at the frequency and type of orientation of the statements, Brophy et al.'s study had a third and main objective.

They related the six teachers' statements with their students' engagement rates taken by the researchers at intervals during the performance of the tasks, even though the criteria upon which the researchers decided on the engagement rates is not made explicit in the report. The results were disappointing. Students were recorded to be more engaged in tasks that had not been preceded by any statement at all. And no clear evidence was found about the positive effects in engagement after positive statements in contrast to neutral or negative statements. However, the authors' sincerity when they present the results needs to be valued: "The findings . . . are not at all what we expected" (p.10).

In the discussion, Brophy et al. find a quite plausible explanation to the unexpected results, especially in the light of Gagné's report. They say that what probably drew teachers to give motivating statements were either their perceptions of the tasks they were introducing as being scarcely motivating to the students or a perception that the students had become difficult to control. If this was true, results would just show that the teachers' statements made little effect to overcome the problems they had anticipated. The authors finally conclude that maybe what should be researched was the relationship between the nature of the task and the engagement rate. In my opinion, if the relationship between teachers' psychological structuring and students' engagement during the presentation of the task (instead of during its performance) had been researched more significant trends could have resulted. Nevertheless, this may be difficult because of the brevity of some openings and because there would be the problem of measuring students' engagement through observation, since it is not always the case that a student who appears to be engaged is

actually so (Doyle, 1986, p. 401).

1.5. SYNTHESIS

What teachers do when they introduce or close a task was a topic of considerable concern in the seventies when Bellack's coding system (1966) was widely used—although other moves like soliciting and responding probably received more attention. Those studies, however, have proved to be poor because they tended to present their results in percentages (i.e., mean percentages of amounts of structuring by the teacher, by the students) without accompanying them with detailed descriptions of the classroom events. Similarly, in the experimental studies there was little control of the extent to which a teacher who was scripted to give a high structured lesson did actually give one.

During the last decade, structuring examined under a pedagogical perspective has not been a hot issue either in general education or in ESL now that Bellack's scheme is less often used. A proof of that is the fact that recent literature contains sparse references to structuring. Because of this scarcity, I have not been able to restrict the present review of the literature to the field of ESL. Instead, studies from a very diverse nature have been reported. Students from different levels of education (primary, secondary, undergraduate and graduate) and different subject matters (French as a foreign language, reading, writing, science, physics and math) have been mentioned.

These later studies coming from the eighties and early nineties, differentiate themselves from earlier ones in that qualitative methods of data collection and analysis are used, sometimes in conjunction with quantitative methods. Consequently, these works are generally more descriptive and insightful. That is, they pay more attention to the process of teaching and learning and

as a result they come up with more detailed accounts. The studies from the eighties and early nineties that have been reported here usually have one or more of the following characteristics in their research questions or methodology:

- They tend to take into account teachers' beliefs and interpretations of classrooms events (the observer is not the only source of information).
- They tend to analyze students' performances and their attitudes towards the teachers/teaching (not just the outcomes).
- They tend to measure or describe the quality of structuring (e.g., cognitive involvement), not just its quantity.
- They tend to include descriptions of the context to help understand the broader patterns of behavior.
- They tend to show interest in bringing the teacher's individual styles forward (not just their similarities)
- They tend to use multiple sources of data collection (e.g., field notes, interviews, action research) and inductive means of analysis. (e.g. content analysis).

I will end this chapter by going over the main findings from the two periods of times (the 60's and 70's on the one hand, and the 80's and early 90's on the other) to finally present the main features of the present study.

(a) First of all it is important to observe that while some studies (mainly Bellack's) laid particular attention to examining the introductions and ends of lessons, other studies that I reviewed have taken the task (not the lesson) as the unit of analysis. This difference probably stems from the subject matter being analyzed and the approach of teaching followed by teacher. There may be

subject matters and teaching approaches where the lesson stands out as a unit over the tasks and vice versa.

(b) The classifications from procedural, topic, linguistic and psychological structuring mirror the wealth of repertoires teachers hold. Differences between studies usually reflect different subject matters and differences in the age of the participants. The problem with some classifications is that sometimes they do not reflect some of the subtleties of the teaching process. In order to see the more complex reality of classroom events, the descriptive accounts are a richer source of information.

(c) Some teachers do not make use of some types of procedural structuring (e.g., the stating of objectives) or they make a less frequent or a superficial use of linguistic and topic structuring. Findings like these show that there may be a gap between what researchers advocate and what teachers implement.

(d) As regards psychological structuring, the different results from the two studies under review in section 1.4. point at the fact that the context must be a determinant factor. Among the similarities between the two studies, it must be said that the teachers seemed to intuitively know the tasks that were not popular with students and the psychological statements were just one among several actions that teachers adopted to overcome that attitude.

(e) As regards the attempts that were made in process-product studies to relate one of the three types of structuring with student outcomes (i.e., achievement or engagement), the results are inconclusive. However, process studies point out some illuminating relationships. Structuring seems to reflect the teacher's beliefs and be sensitive to his expectations. It also seems to have an influence

on students (i.e., how they carry out a task, how satisfied they are).

1.6. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The present study has the aim of being a contribution to the existing knowledge about structuring. In the literature, structuring is often mentioned but only passing attention is given to it. My research focuses solely on this topic and is a follow-up to the study in second language teaching (Gagné, 1992) which, to my knowledge, is the only piece of work that focuses on my definition of structuring more closely and deals with it more thoroughly. Building on her well-structured approach and her interesting findings and interpretations, the present study resembles Gagné's in that I focus on the three types of structuring that Gagné first distinguished (procedural, linguistic and psychological). However, it differs from it in certain respects:

- Gagné did not look at her two teachers' differing structuring styles. My own reinterpretation of the two teachers' linguistic and psychological structuring seems to point to the existence of differences. Looking then at teachers' individual structuring styles is going to be one of the objectives of the present study.
- She examined just the beginning of tasks. I feel that the ends of tasks may be as informative about structuring as beginnings. Maybe the amount of linguistic, content and psychological structuring raises considerably when the ending of tasks are considered. Thus the present study is going to examine structuring at both ends of tasks, the beginning and their closure.
- She analyzed public talk only and focused mainly on the teacher. It may be interesting to have information about what students say in their side-talk while the teacher is structuring. In contrast, the present study takes into account the learner as

an important subject of analysis in conjunction with the teacher. Even though limited by the quality of the recordings, the present study captures some side-talk and analyzes that which relates to structuring.

- Although Gagné complemented her frequency counts from the lesson transcripts with the interviews with teachers, in her report she did not intertwine detailed information about what happened in the lessons. In the present study I intend to combine numerical information with thick description⁹.

In short, through detailed descriptions complemented with frequency counts the present study examines teachers and students when structuring takes place in class. It focuses mainly in the public talk but it also deals with the private spheres of classroom interaction. The analysis will include both the introductions and "exitings" of lessons and tasks and it will pay attention to three types of information: procedural, linguistic (including topic), and psychological. Finally, when relevant major differences between the classes or teachers are observed, these will be further analyzed.

⁹ Thick description is a term from anthropology and it means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated (Merriam, 1991, p. 11)

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This chapter gives a detailed account of how the study was conducted. First of all, there is an outline of the paradigm under which this study falls as well as a description of the prototypical features of studies under this paradigm. The following sections describe the different stages of the study: the articulation of the research statement, the data gathering and entry to the site, the data analysis and finally the process of writing the thesis.

2.1. THE INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGM

The present study should be interpreted within the broad trend of interpretive research in teaching in opposition to traditional positivistic research (process-product or process-process-product-studies). Interpretive research is referred to in the literature under different labels such as qualitative, case study,

naturalistic and descriptive¹. This trend gained recognition in the 60's and became established in the 70's when schools started to be the subject of investigation.

Researchers working under this interpretative paradigm seek to increase understanding of classroom phenomena (in opposition to improvement). They focus on one case (e.g. one teacher or learner) or a small number of cases because they do not seek generalization but understanding of just that/those case(s). The researchers visit the setting and experience it because the natural context is an important factor. In fact, each context is regarded as unique, as Erickson (1986a) explains:

Interpretative researchers presume that microcultures will differ from one classroom to the next, no matter what degree of similarity in general demographic features obtains between the two rooms, which may be located literally next door or across the hall from one another. (p. 128)

In the examination of events the researcher seeks to get a holistic perspective because he is interested in uncovering as many factors as possible and in exploring the interaction between them. The purpose is not to test hypotheses but to generate them.

Among the arguments used to take this approach to research is that it is well suited to study phenomena that have been little researched and whose variables cannot be predetermined. Another attractive factor is that reports under this paradigm seem to be more informative and understandable to teachers with no prior training in reading educational research.

¹ Ethnographic research is a specific type of interpretative research. It makes the further claim of having a culturally focused orientation (Wolcott, 1992). What is ethnographic about studies labeled interpretative, qualitative, case study etc. is that all of them follow ethnographic techniques of data collection.

This conception of educational research that capitalizes on such words as understanding and context has major repercussions as to how research is used for teacher education as well as on the methods followed for investigation. I now turn to the description of these repercussions.

2.1.1. The role of interpretative research in teacher development

Interpretative research does not build into the research design a conception of goodness because it does not want to find out a priori which teaching practices are effective and which not. This non-judgemental orientation to research matches a trend in teacher development, both in general education and ESL, that is equally non-judgemental (Erickson, 1986b; Fanselow, 1988; Griffin, 1986; Schön, 1987; Wajuryb, 1992). This research offers adequate data for the reflection sought in this type of teacher education, whose philosophy is summarized by Fanselow like this:

To help means we have something to give another, a product to sell. The whole thrust of the point of view and activities presented in this article is toward the value of process, not product, and toward the construction of our own knowledge, not the acceptance of the knowledge of others in some type of package, as a product. (p. 1)

Through factual information, new concepts, schemata and ways of looking at classroom events that may not be readily apparent (Zumwalt, 1982, p. 221), interpretative research fits in well with this non-prescriptive perspective on teacher development. Interpretative research can contribute to teachers gaining understanding about the nature of teaching and learning. Some of

what one does when teaching becomes invisible to the practitioner over time. This research can be a mirror to see one's own invisible practices that can become visible when reading the practices of other teachers narrated in interpretative reports. In short, this research can contribute to the growth as professionals of experienced and inexperienced teachers.

2.1.2. The methods of investigation in interpretative research

The research methodology followed by interpretative investigators differs from traditional positivistic methodology in every stage of the investigation: (a) the articulation of the research statement (b) the collection and (c) analysis of data, and (d) the writing up of the report.

(a) The research statement

One of the main traits of this paradigm lies in the articulation of the research statement or question. It can start with the identification of an interest which becomes more and more focused as the researcher comes into contact with the setting and is exposed to it. In an article titled "Teaching Qualitative Research" (1992), Webb and Glesne say:

It is difficult for some students to understand that qualitative researchers begin their work without the guidance of a predefined research problem. Instead they should have foreshadowed questions that may grow from theoretical literature, from the researcher's own experience, or from the researcher's own values and ideological commitments. The first task for the student is to ask "What really interests me, puzzles me, arouses my curiosity? (pp. 790-791)

The research statement then begins as open and broad and it can be modified as the research progresses.

How much the research statement guides the process of data collection differs depending on how explicit and focused the statement or problem initially is. On one end of the continuum one can approach fieldwork relying mainly on intuition or one can approach fieldwork with a strong sense of deliberateness. Both extremes are dangerous from my point of view. Being guided by too vague an idea of the phenomenon one wants to study can be a nonproductive process. After having left the field and upon doing the intensive analysis of the data, the researcher can then realize that some data was collected that will not be used and that data that should have been collected is missing (see Erickson for an enumeration of other problems, 1986a, p. 140). About this issue Wolcott has said (1990):

New enthusiasm for qualitative approaches, especially as it has come to mean and invite more open-endedness in what we look for and how we proceed, has exacerbated the problem of problem setting. It makes no sense to go off conducting research without an idea of what is to be researched: empty-headedness is not the same as open-mindedness. (p. 31)

Webb and Glesne (1992, p. 729) say that students who do not succeed in narrowing down the topic of research during early data collection have the most problems in the research process. The main problems that these authors report are students presenting research questions that are unclear, too vague or too ambitious. However, they admit that complete clarity of the research question is not achieved until much later. On the other hand, entering the field with a clear fixed idea of what needs to be examined can

preclude revisiting and redefining the research statement if no room for intuition is left. In this respect, Wolcott has said (1990):

I do not wish to create an impression that a research focus is a sacred thing—that once declared it deserves unwavering loyalty or that, once fixed, the course of a research project must never be altered. Part of the strategy of qualitative inquiry . . . is that our research questions themselves remain under continual scrutiny. Nothing should prevent a research question or problem statement from undergoing the same metamorphosis as the researcher during the course of a study. (p.32)

In conclusion, a balance should be found between coming up with a statement that has been sufficiently narrowed down at the same time that some flexibility and openness is kept.

(b) Data collection

The other major trait in interpretative research is that the researcher comes into contact with the setting and gets information from mainly three types of activities: watching, asking and reviewing (Wolcott, 1992).

As regards “watching,” the researcher can choose between different degrees of involvement in the event (going from full involvement to remaining an outsider). Observations can be written down (field notes taken on site or after leaving the setting) or they can be mechanically recorded (video tapes, tape recorders, photographs). Field notes and recordings are two different ways of getting an understanding of the phenomenon. Writing field notes, the researcher gets insights of the phenomenon through exposure to the field, while with the use of recorded means of observation the insights are generated when transcribing the tapes and on multiple listenings/reviewings of the data. Erickson (1992, p. 206) advises

that the initial observations should start as quite impressionistic accounts and progressively get focused.

“Asking” can take the shape of informal encounters with the participants involved in the event or formal arrangements (interviews and questionnaires) with differing degrees of openness and structure.

The other source of information is the documents that are generated in the setting under study (handouts, notebooks, grades, corrected homework) and that can, in some way, inform the research problem.

Through the use of these three means of data collection (i.e., triangulation) the researcher ensures internal validity; the question of how one's interpretation matches reality.

(c) Data analysis

The analysis of the data is a key point from the very start of the research study because its progress is informed by it. The researcher combines data collection with early data analysis, the latter aiding the decisions needed to be made during data collection (e.g., how much to observe, who to ask) and informing the revision of the research statement.

Once the researcher leaves the field, data analysis continues, now more intensely, however. Manuals advise following three steps in the process. First, it is important to organize the data in such a way that it is easily retrievable, taking into account that qualitative research entails voluminous amounts of data. Second, multiple readings of all the data need to be done to get a holistic view. Through the readings the researcher is doing a type of brainstorming, which he notes down at the margins of the data.

From those notes a primitive classification emerges, which is the starting point for the next step. The third step consists in the emergence of relationships, the development of categories and the finding of unifying themes.

Beyond these basic guidelines to make sense of the data, Webb and Glesne (1992) comment that this inductive process is mainly creative and probably because of that, it is rarely described in detail in manuals: "Texts say surprisingly little about how data analysis actually is done. What the books do say leaves students with the impression that unity will emerge almost magically from the data and present itself to researchers as a reward for their perseverance" (p. 797) Merriam (1991) uses the analogy of the detective to describe the difficulty of the job of the researcher at this stage and warns that the researcher working under an interpretative paradigm needs to have certain qualities to succeed in the endeavor ("tolerance for uncertainty for an indefinite period of time," p. 37). Today there are computer programs in the market that can aid with the organization of information and the coding process, but no one can substitute for the researcher in the actual unravelling of the puzzle, in the "thinking" part.

There are three types of end products of the data analysis: descriptive, interpretative or exploratory and evaluative or explanatory. Descriptive studies limit themselves to presenting an account of the phenomenon under study, they neither formulate hypotheses nor test them. Interpretative studies include and build categories, develop typologies and suggest relationships. Evaluative studies have the purpose of building a theory and are more abstract pieces of work than descriptive or interpretative studies.

(d) Writing up the report

The report of a piece of interpretative research distinguishes itself from a piece of traditional positivistic research mainly by three features: (d1) the personal tone of the narrative, (d2) the detail in the description of the context and (d3) the preeminence of words (not numbers) in the writing of the report.

d1. The tone

The narrative of the report often takes a personal tone, given that the researcher is an integral part of the data and that there is the implied understanding that all descriptive accounts are interpretations of reality. Wolcott recommends using the first person singular to write these descriptive accounts (1990, p. 19).

d2. The context

In these types of reports the chapter describing the context acquires great importance and is dealt with quite thoroughly. This is so because:

- This type of research lies under the assumption that events are greatly shaped by its context. For the reader to be able to understand the true meaning of the phenomenon under study, he needs to have some knowledge of the context.
- In writing up the report, the researcher also wants the reader to experience part of what he experienced in the setting. Consequently, in the same way that the observer needed to immerse himself in the context during data collection, the reader needs to gain knowledge from it.
- Additionally, for the reader to be able to evaluate the transferability of the findings of a study embedded in a

setting to another situation, he needs to have access to the necessary information about this setting.

d3. Words over numbers

The findings of the reports in an interpretative study come mainly in words, more concretely in an integration of particular description (mainly synoptic data, quotes from interviews and field notes, narrative vignettes and excerpts from transcripts) and interpretation. Strauss and Corbin (1990) use this preeminence of words over numbers to define qualitative research: "By the term qualitative research we mean any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p. 17).

Qualitative researchers say it is difficult to find a balance between these two elements (description and analysis) in the narrative of the report. In the field of sociology, Leffland (cited in Merriam, 1991, p. 199) reports that the general trend is sixty to seventy percent of particular description versus thirty or forty percent of interpretation. But there are no set numbers in education. In any case, the account needs to include enough illustrations for the reader to understand and experience the phenomena and judge the validity of interpretations.

2.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The present study was conceived under the interpretative paradigm and consequently shares the characteristics mentioned in the preceding section (2.1.) as regards purpose, teaching implications and methodology. The purpose is that of gaining understanding of how the teachers under study structured language-learning tasks in their respective classrooms. The idea is not to find the best ways in structuring or to end up with a list of classroom implications but that potential readers see aspects of their teaching reflected in the teachers under analysis. In line with an interpretative methodology, the research statement in the present study was handled with flexibility through the different stages of the study, the data was collected from different sources and analyzed inductively. A journal was kept to keep track of the history of the research from the very start. Finally, the final product was written up combining particular description with interpretation (no attempt was made to build a theory).

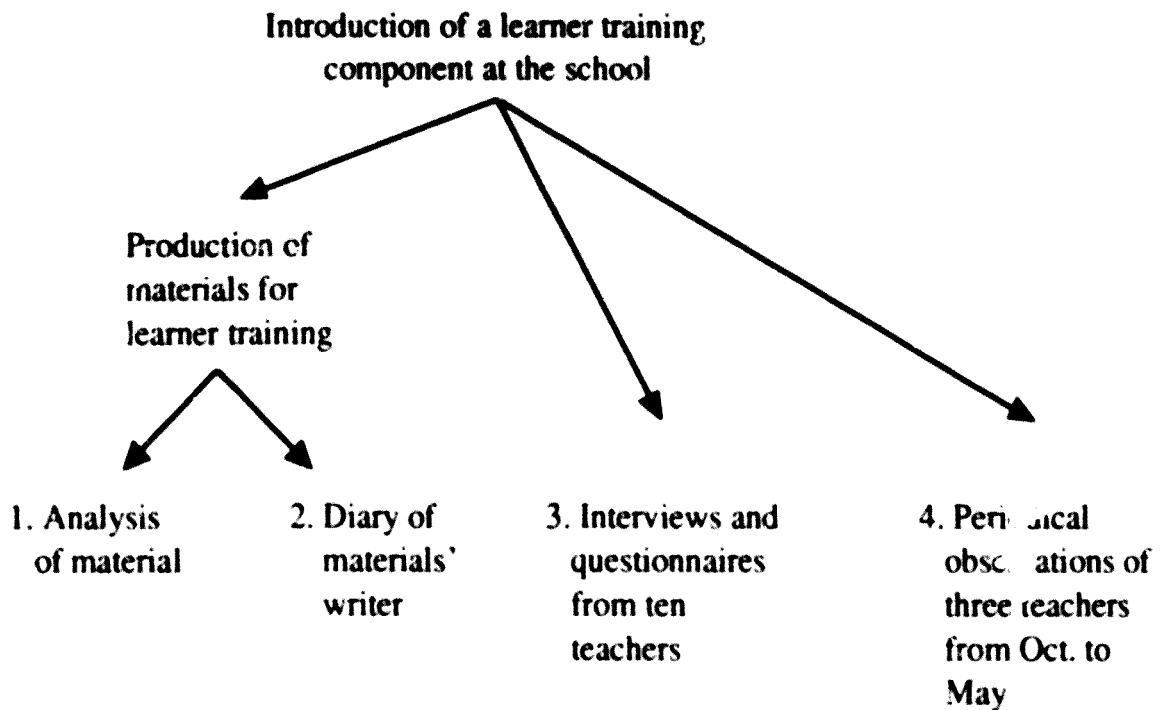
2.2.1. The development of the research statement

The research statement of the present study is not the same as the one I articulated at the start of the data collection in October 1991. The year before, I had been working part-time at a language school which was going to introduce the component of learner training in the syllabus of the four first levels of the English courses. My initial idea for this thesis (articulated in a ten-page document) was to analyze the introduction of that innovation (learner training) at the school during its first year of implementation.

There were three focal sources of data collection in my initial plans (see Figure 1): (a) the analysis of the production of learner training materials, a task that a teacher was in charge of at the school; (b) interviews and questionnaires from a sample of teachers at the school and (c) the periodical observation of three teachers. As regards the production of materials, the idea was to analyze them as well as get periodical information from the teacher in charge of the innovation through a diary. With the interviews and questionnaires to ten teachers the intention was to elicit the teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards learner training issues and to have them report on how they introduced the component of learner training that year. A closer follow-up of the experience would be provided by the periodical observation of the classes of three teachers where I would personally see how the innovation was being introduced as the year progressed.

The academic year started and I began the process of data collection described briefly above. As the year went by, however, my interest moved away from learner training at the school level and centered more and more on the three teachers I was periodically observing. I progressively came to realize that the material gathered just from those observations could render enough raw data for a study of the present dimensions. This growing interest in the classroom was accompanied by a gradual realization of two handicaps in the design of the initial research statement: (a) the unsuitability of the periodical observations as a means of data collection and (b) insufficient access to information that was necessary.

Figure 1

The initial problem statement(a) Unsuitability of observations

Through the observations I had expected to observe teachers using the learner training materials prepared by the staff of the school as well as to observe if the teachers integrated some aspect of learner training into their regular teaching. In practice, there was very little information that I could get from these observations. Teachers made very little use of the learner training material and it was difficult to know in advance when they would be using it, which made my observations difficult to plan. On the other hand, in their regular teaching it was difficult to pinpoint what could be considered as learner training and what I captured seemed to be

little information in the light of the time invested visiting those classes.

Out of the awareness of this difficulty as well as my growing interest in the classroom, I started to shift my attention to a broader topic, how teachers introduced tasks, approximately three months after my observations had started. This was somehow related to learner training, since it seemed to me that teachers who integrated learner training in their teaching would be more informative in the introduction of tasks. In addition, I gradually saw that this topic of structuring had some potential for investigation.

(b) Insufficient access to information

This other realization came more progressively. Little by little, I became conscious that in order to examine the implementation of the innovation (learner training) it would have been much better for the researcher to be actively involved in the change. I felt I was not experiencing what was really going on at the school because of not being part of the staff. Besides, the materials' writer, who first acceded to try and keep a diary, did not manage to do so and his would have been one major source of information that I no longer had.

Towards the end of that school year I felt that the information that I had from items 1, 2, and 3 (see Figure 1) was incomplete. Yet, I felt that the focus of my observations and interest had evolved towards a topic that was no longer learner training, but the analysis of how teachers introduced tasks and gave instructions. In addition, it would have been difficult to integrate the information from items 1, 2 and 3 with the information from item 4 (the observations). I

also felt I had enough data from the classroom observations. I finally decided to concentrate just on the observations (and the topic of structuring) and to discard most of the rest of the data collected (except for some parts from the questionnaires and interviews from item 3 of the teachers I had been observing).

2.2.2. Data collection

2.2.2.1. Watching

I conducted two types of observations from lessons: (a) field notes and (b) audio records. Independently of the type of observation, I used to sit towards the back of the classroom without interacting with students or the teacher during class time, except on a few occasions where the teacher requested my participation or initiated a chat with me. I would arrive before the lesson started and usually stayed for the whole period of class time. The teachers from the three classes observed were never asked to do or prepare anything special for my visits with the purpose of gathering a set of data that was as naturalistic as possible.

(a) Field notes

During the first half of the year (from October to February) I visited each of the three classes from six to seven times and took notes during the observations. The purpose of those visits was twofold: (a) to collect data about the general teaching style of the teachers, with a special emphasis on procedural structuring and (b) to give some time for both the teachers and students to get used to

my presence in class before I would go in with the recording equipment, which was quite obtrusive.

After leaving the lessons I rewrote my field notes in expanded form. The contents of these notes usually included (a) the date of the observation, (b) a diagram of the class configuration, (c) the division of the text into tasks (d) direct quotes or the substance of what the teacher or students said and (e) my comments as the observer. I did not try to record everything the teacher said during a lesson but what I found most revealing of his teaching style, especially what was concerned with structuring content rather than instructional content. I also recorded the contents of relevant informal conversations that I would have with the students and especially the teachers before, during and after the lessons or when we met at the school by chance. Because I had the time for reflection during the writing up of my raw field notes, the number of observer's comments are quite frequent in this final record. The observer's insights included: the teachers' and students' reactions to my presence, my role as an observer, generalizations about the whole lesson, generalizations about a teacher across lessons, comparisons and contrasts between the three teachers and relationships between different aspects of the teaching style of the teacher being observed. Appendix A presents the expanded form of the field notes from my second observation to one of the three classes in late October. The observer's interpretations have been italicized since they are interwoven throughout the notes.

(b) Audio records

The machine recordings started in the second half of the year (the bulk of it starting in March) and continued up until May. Each

class was audio recorded² on seven occasions, the first of which was a mock recording to get the teacher and students used to the presence of the machinery in class. The purpose of these audio records was to be able to examine closely how teachers started tasks without the pressure of real life observation.

During the observations I stayed next to the microphone mixer. I also kept a record of the tasks in each lesson and kept a record of which student said what so that I could include the identification of students in the subsequent transcript. Keeping this record took most of my attention and I had to discontinue writing notes during class time.

Three microphones were used to record the lessons: a very powerful cordless microphone and two hand microphones supported by floor stands. More than one microphone was used because in these lessons a lot of class time was spent working in groups and just one microphone would only have captured the teacher's interactions with the whole class. The microphone mixer permitted me to choose which microphone to turn on depending on which conversation I was interested in at a given moment. In the first two recordings of each class, the cordless microphone was worn by the teacher and the microphone stands were placed by the students. But after transcribing those first transcripts, I realized that the teacher talk was much louder than the students' and would probably be easily captured by the less powerful hand microphones. From the third observation on, the cordless microphone was handed to a student and the two hand

² Video recording was discarded because of budget problems and because of its obtrusiveness.

microphones were placed near the front of the room oriented towards the teacher.

After each recording, I produced a raw transcript of the parts of the lessons that I perceived could be relevant to structuring. I mainly transcribed sequences consisting of: (a) The teacher addressing the whole class at the start of tasks and at the beginning and end of lessons; (b) the teacher adding procedural information during the carrying out of tasks; (c) students' public reactions to tasks and (d) students' displays of lack of understanding of tasks addressed to the teacher. Similarly to the field notes, I tried to transcribe each lesson shortly after the observation to make the transcribing of the text easier when the lesson was still fresh in my mind. If some reflection came to my mind about the recorded lesson while in class or when transcribing, I would write an entry in the notebook where I had kept the field notes. Each tape was indexed with the fictitious name of the teacher and the date. Excerpts quoted in the present study use this information as identification together with the numbers from the counter of the tape, which was set at zero at the start of each recorded lesson.

The recordings were listened to a second time and raw transcripts revised some months after the data collection had finished. By that time, data analysis had started and I had gotten quite interested in aspects of the lessons that had not received full attention on the first hearing. These aspects were: (a) the students' side-talk when the teachers presented tasks or shortly after (b) ways of performing a task especially during group work that did not coincide with the teachers' directions at the introduction and (c) how teachers brought tasks to an end (previously I had mainly focused on the introductions of tasks). All in all, I was examining

classroom interaction at three levels (public talk, side-talk and talk during group work) with a especial emphasis on the first one. In the final transcripts, practically all public talk was transcribed together with the audible side-talk and group work that was relevant to my purposes. See Appendices K, L and M for a sample transcript from each teacher and Appendix J for the transcription conventions.

All the observational data amounted to eighty-six pages of field notes and three hundred and ten pages of the machine recorded documentary taken in a total of forty-one days spent in the classrooms of the three teachers under study, Bob, Mark and Sharon (fourteen non-consecutive visits in Bob and Mark's class and thirteen non-consecutive visits in Sharon's class). Appendix B reports on the distribution of hours per teacher and dates of the observations. Field notes recorded twenty lessons (seven from Bob's class, seven from Mark's and six from Sharon's). And eighteen lessons³ were transcribed amounting to four hours and fifty-two minutes of recorded data from Bob, nine hours and twenty-nine minutes from Mark and four hours and fifty-eight minutes from Sharon. More hours from Mark's class were transcribed because his class met for two hours while Bob's and Sharon's were one-hour classes. In spite of this difference, I decided to observe that class as many days as the other two (six times each) because a lot of time in that class was spent carrying out tasks that were not highly informative for my purposes (returning and correcting homework). It needs to be added that throughout the observations an effort was

³ The first recording from each class was not transcribed.

made not to visit classes on the same days of the week in order to gather as much variety as possible (see Appendix C).

2.2.2.2. Asking

The observations were complemented by going to the teachers and asking them questions through a questionnaire and an interview. Unfortunately, these two instruments were devised with a common aim of getting familiar with the teachers' beliefs and teaching style in general as well as getting familiar with their views on learner training. Because of this, some of the information generated by these two means of data collection did not turn out to be relevant for the present study. Nevertheless, some very relevant information could be obtained about the teachers' general beliefs as well as about concrete descriptions of their students and their own practices in those classes observed.

As regards the questionnaire, only three items (items 1, 2 and 8) have been useful for my purposes (see Appendix D). The first question asked teachers what they valued most in students and gave a set of ten responses including an open option, which teachers had to number from most to least important. The second question asked teachers to describe what functions they saw themselves as having in class. A number of suggestions were given to facilitate the response (i.e., facilitator, model, manager, informant etc). The eighth question asked about the objectives teachers planned to include in their teaching. A set of ten responses were given including an open option and teachers had to number them from one to ten. The questionnaire was given to the three teachers at the beginning of the academic year. Two teachers, Bob and Sharon, completed it but the third teacher, Mark, did not.

Regarding the interviews, I formally met with each teacher once for about half an hour. The meeting was handled as a semi-structured interview. My main function as interviewer was to focus attention on two broad issues (the teachers' perceptions of their respective classes under study and their positions and practices in learner training). I had these two topics in mind but the wording and the timing of the questions were largely decided on the spot and the teachers were left free to express completely their own line of thought.

The interviews took place either at the school or in a cafeteria. Bob and Sharon were interviewed at the beginning of December. Mark was also asked to be interviewed then but he did not seem to welcome the idea at that time and I did not insist. When he was asked again in May, he acceded. The three interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for later analysis. Appendix E reproduces part of one of these interviews.

2.2.2.3. Reviewing

During the academic year 91/92, I collected written material that was in the field and had not been produced for the research. This material could be relevant to complement the information gotten from the observations, questionnaires and interviews. From the school I collected the handbook that was distributed to all English teachers at the school. This handbook included a description of the school and the student population as well as a section on broad teaching guidelines. The syllabus of the level of the classes I was going to observe was also included in this handbook. From the classroom, I collected handouts that the teachers distributed to the students. And at the end of the year I took note of the grades

students in the three teachers' classes had gotten both in the June and September exams.

2.2.2.4. The journal

Regular entries were written in a journal where I kept an introspective record of the history of the research. The journal included feelings, attempts to see what I was doing wrong when I was stuck, recapitulations and plans for future work, minutes from meetings with my advisor etc. A separate file was kept for the notes on collateral readings and transitional research papers.

2.2.3. Data analysis

During the gathering of the data in 91/92, I was burdened down by writing up the field notes and transcribing the recorded lessons and the interviews. The reflections generated in the meantime were jotted down in the field notes and the research journal as they came up. I only had the time for organizing my thoughts in a more conscious manner on two occasions during that academic year. Before Christmas I wrote down a seventeen-page document describing the general teaching style of each teacher. In February there was an attempt to draw some categories to describe the teachers' structuring of language-learning tasks with the purpose of doing some coding on site. But after a couple of trials I gave up.

My activities to analyze the raw data after data collection could be grouped into four: preparing the data for analysis, brainstorming, doing intensive analyses of emerging themes and finding a general framework.

In order to prepare the data for analysis I identified tasks and stages within tasks in lessons and identified the structuring taking place at the introduction and conclusion of each task and stage (a subdivision of tasks). I felt I needed this information in order to analyze how teachers started and concluded tasks.

Brainstorming consisted of going through the field notes and transcripts and writing as many ideas and interpretations as came to my mind without worrying about whether they were interesting enough or whether they were part of my research statement. On the first brainstorming session, the ideas were written on the same transcripts and field notes themselves, which had been photocopied. On subsequent general readings, separate sheets of paper were used to elaborate on ideas.

During intensive analysis I chose one theme (e.g., the clarity of instructions or the explanations of grammar during introductions to tasks) and collected as much information on it from each teacher. A technique that I found useful was to start analyzing the teacher that I initially felt would render more information for a given theme. In the process of reducing the data into a descriptive account, several analytical skills were applied: finding and counting patterns, clustering, subdividing categories, noting relations between variables. After analyzing all the relevant data from one teacher, I would write a brief summary and went on to analyze the next teacher. Then I tried to apply the same categories and concepts found for the first teacher, making the relevant changes and adaptations. When the three teachers had been analyzed separately, I drew comparisons between them. To do that, I found it very helpful to compare tasks from the three teachers that were similar. Then I could see what one teacher had done that another had not

done or had done differently. This analysis usually culminated in a transitional research paper, a tentative synthesis.

Intensive analysis was done with the transcripts first. When a tentative research paper started to take a less provisional shape, I examined the field notes, the interviews, the questionnaires and occasionally a document and integrated the relevant information from these sources into the research paper. A very efficient method was used to extract the relevant information from field notes and interviews. I assigned a color for each different theme (e.g. blue for "linguistic structuring," red for "topic structuring," green for "specific instructions") and when I read through the written data I highlighted the relevant information with a different color (see Appendices A and D). This procedure proved to be a very quick system to locate needed information. The field notes, interviews, questionnaires and documents were used to add categories, provide further illustrations, confirm or disconfirm interpretations drawn from transcripts and relate the described behaviors with the teachers' beliefs and attitudes. Information from these sources was not included in frequency counts, however.

Another type of activity consisted in attempting to integrate all my insights from the different themes into a structured framework, which would translate into the different sections chapters 4 and 5 would be composed of. These different sections would have to allow me to present in a logical way everything I had perceived in the brainstorming sessions and elaborated on through intensive analysis.

The process I followed in analyzing the data was not sequential but full of diversions. I started by brainstorming the

lessons of one teacher and later on attempted to get a provisional general picture of what the main themes would be in the present study (a first attempt to a framework). Then I went back to brainstorming the other two teachers' lessons. Probably the stage of brainstorming was going to be the most fluent part in this process. After that, I saw the need to find systematic criteria to identify the tasks and their stages in lessons and I started that endeavor. Fragmenting the lessons was not something that I did without problems. I worked on this on three different occasions until I ended up with a satisfying division. Looking back on it, I think that I became immersed in the fragmenting of tasks, spending too much time and effort on something that was only a means to the core of my analysis.

Another problem was encountered in the search for the picture of what the analysis would look like as a whole (a sort of scheme, a framework), a picture which I would not have up until a very advanced stage of the intensive analysis. The problem seemed to be similar to the one stated in the paragraph above. During the intensive analysis, sometimes I scrutinized themes with such detail that I could lose sight of the globality of the project. I would go down to a microanalytical level of analysis when my initial purpose was to concentrate on content, not on the discourse for its own sake. This excessive detail was probably influenced by my readings of microethnographic analyses. Another contributing factor to the slowness in the data analysis might be that I consciously chose to start by examining themes that were less important, thinking that it would be easier and encouraging to start with the smaller bits. On 10/2/94, I wrote in my journal:

Ara veig que potser m'estava costant tant perquè he evitat durant massa temps analitzar la part més important de les dades. Al no fer això em faltava la visió general de com analitzar les dades. Esperem que sigui això.

On several occasions during the intensive analysis, I realized the need for a general picture of where I was going to, and then after these realizations there were trials to do a more general analysis. These attempts to zoom in and out progressively became frustrating as time went by and I did not yet see where I was heading. Looking back on the experience, I literally feel this process of analysis to have been similar to working through a puzzle. I tried to put pieces together for too long without knowing what the image of the puzzle would look like in the end. Once I finally caught sight of the general framework, I felt relieved and pieces started fitting together with much more ease. It was probably time to revise drafts and write the final report.

2.2.4. Writing up

The description and interpretation of the data has been split into three chapters in the actual writing of this study: chapter 4 and 5 (analysis) and chapter 6 (discussion). In chapters 4 and 5 I deal with each theme separately in sections and compare the differences between teachers under each theme. The assertions and descriptions are backed up sometimes with features of the teaching style of individual teachers outside structuring as well as beliefs reported by those teachers.

Chapter 6 is more of a synthesis and exploration. First each teacher is described individually by drawing on the information that was presented separately in the preceding chapters. Then there is a section where I draw connections across sections and

formulate hypotheses that are less backed up with evidence than assertions made in the preceding two chapters.

2.3. SUMMARY

The present study analyzes how three teachers structured language-learning tasks under an interpretative paradigm. This means that teacher practices are not classed as effective or ineffective, and that qualitative means of data collection and analysis are used.

The collection of data for the study started in October and ended in May. The primary data of the study consists of eighteen audio recorded lessons from three teachers (six each) and the secondary data consists of field notes, a questionnaire and an interview with each teacher. The visits to the classes were non-consecutive and teachers were not asked to do anything special during my visits. The data have been analyzed through inductive means by looking mainly at the content of classroom interaction. The final report includes both description and interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER 3: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The data collected for the present study comes from three language classes where English was taught as a foreign language at the language school of a public university in Spain. Each class was taught by a different teacher (Bob, Mark and Sharon) teaching the same level of proficiency (level three). What follows is a description of the setting and the participants (teachers and students) with the purpose of giving the reader a frame in which to interpret the resulting analysis. In the final section there is information on how I got permission to enter the classrooms of the respective teachers and how I introduced the study to the participants.

3.1. THE SCHOOL

The staff at the Language School where the present study was

carried out is dedicated to the teaching of foreign languages¹. The school, located in a major city in Spain, is geared to the population of students at the university, but it is not restricted to it. However, a minimum educational standard of COU is required in order to enrol. Even though at the time the data was collected the school was, to a certain extent, integrated into the University, it was not financed by the University and the students' fees were the major source of finance.

In 91-92, the English Section at the Language School had a staff of 26 teachers (out of the 34 in the school) with an enrollment of 2,175 students in different types of courses (normal, intensive or specific). In the handbook that teachers were given in October 1991, the student population of the school was characterized as follows,

Motivation is varied and often rather vague; while many mainly need English for reading academic works, they are often quite content to work on this aspect by themselves (although this does not mean that they do not need any help with reading) and prefer to dedicate class time to oral skills. (Handbook for 1991-1992, p. 5)

It should be remembered that students' backgrounds will be very varied, ranging from those who have studied English for several years to those who have done but one year with us . . . and others who have a reasonable passive knowledge but who have not used their English for some time. (Handbook for 1991-1992, p. 15)

In the academic year of 91-92, the school offered seven levels of normal courses (four hours a week totalling 110-120 hours of tuition). The first five (levels 1, 2, 3, 4, and "curs pont") were quite general in purpose and got students to an upper-intermediate proficiency. The last two (levels 5 and 6) were geared to advanced

¹ In 91/92 the school organized courses of seven foreign languages.

students and had a strong academic component as well as work load.

3.2. THE COURSE AND THE CLASSES

The three classes where the data was collected from were level three classes, which was an intermediate course. At that level, basic grammatical structures and communicative skills were consolidated and complex ones introduced. All level three classes in the school were required to use the same textbook, which in this case was the textbook and practice book The Cambridge English Course 3 (1987). Students were also asked to purchase an Anthology, which was supplementary material prepared by the teachers at the school mainly serving the purpose of coaching students for the final exam. Another requirement at the school concerned homework, which teachers should set once a week.

Even though there was this unification as regards textbooks and homework assignments, there were few other restrictions:

Teachers have a wide degree of freedom to present the syllabus in the way they consider best. Most classes appreciate the use of the textbook at least sometimes, as it gives a sense of direction to the course, but they will also welcome changes in the order of "doing" units . . . and such changes . . . are usually a good idea. . . . English should be used as much as possible in the classroom, while Catalan or Castilian may be used when necessary for instructions, clarification, contrastive language work or administrative purposes. . . . Given the size of the classes (no more than 25), pair and group work should be widely used. . . . The attitude that the English class is just another lecture is unfortunately all too common. Clearly it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that the class isn't a lecture and to impress upon students the need to attend whenever possible and to participate. (Handbook for 1991-1992, pp. 15-16)

Teachers at the school would then vary in how much and how the textbook was used. In addition, teachers had at their disposal rich supplementary material which they could easily copy and which they were encouraged to use.

Besides the final exam, which was common to all students at that level, the other convergent reference point for level three was the syllabus (see Appendix F). This three-page programme included three sections: grammar, themes and learner training.

Out of the three classes taking part in the study, two were held at the School of Physics (Mark's and Sharon's classes) and the other one at the School of Economics (Bob's class). Mark's class met twice a week (Mondays and Tuesdays) from seven to nine p.m. — with a short break in between. Sharon's met for one hour four days a week from Monday to Thursday from one to two p.m.. Bob's class met for one hour every day from Monday to Thursday from two to three p.m.. The three classes were normal 120-hour courses starting in October and finishing in May.

3.3. THE CLASSROOMS

None of the classrooms where classes were held in Economics and Physics were designed to teach languages. For the most part of the day, courses related to the area of study of the corresponding school were taught in those classrooms.

At the School of Physics the classrooms where Mark's and Sharon's classes met had exactly the same characteristics. The classrooms could fit forty students seated in four rows of long desks fixed to the floor. Desks were not individual but could seat five students each, which left a comfortable corridor between one

group of desks and the other. The teacher's desk was about 1.5 m long and there was no platform in the front of the room.

At the School of Economics the room could fit a hundred and twenty students. The students' seats consisted of ten long one-piece desks fixed to the floor and with a capacity of twelve students per row, so there was no central corridor. The teacher's desk was about two meters long and was situated on a wooden platform in front of the blackboard. As regards physical conditions, it should be added that at the time the data was collected some construction work was being carried out very close to where this classroom was, the noise of which was frequently audible.

In short, the size of the classrooms at Physics was more adequate for the number of students that these language classes had (an initial enrollment of about 25 students). The classroom at Economics was designed for lecturing to a large audience.

3.4. THE STUDENTS

The personal information from the learners attending the classes observed comes from forty-six students (17 from Bob's class, 11 from Mark's class and 18 from Sharon's class) and it was collected through writing towards the end of the academic year, mostly during class time. Fewer students from Mark's class filled out this questionnaire because there was a drop of attendance in this class by the end of the year that was not so acute in the other two classes. Because of this, in interpreting this data the reader will have to take into account that the biographical information of

students from Mark's class is somewhat incomplete or less representative.

Table 3 is a visual account of the students' characteristics. It includes information on the age, the working or student status of the participants, and their history in learning foreign languages. Unless the information seems to differ between the three groups, the subjects from the three classes will be described together.

The majority of the students were undergraduates, even though in each class there was one graduate student and from one to three people who were not students. This means that most of these language learners were young adults (19-24 years old). In spite of the few respondents from Mark's class, those who filled out the questionnaire tended to be a bit older with respect to those from the other two classes. In Mark's class there were fewer students from the first university cycle.

The location of the teaching logically determined the university degree most students were pursuing. Mark's and Sharon's classes, which took place in the School of Physics, had students from this school as well as from Chemistry (whose building is attached to the School of Physics). Bob's class, which took place in Economics, had a majority of students pursuing a degree in the School of Economics.

There were also differences between classes as regards the number of students who worked, a factor that seems to be related to the time classes met. Bob's and Sharon's classes met around lunch time and most of the students attending them did not work. Mark's class, on the other hand, met in the evening, a time that seemed to have attracted students who worked (either part-time or full-time).

Table 3

Description of students

Descriptors		Class			
		Bob n=17	Mark n=11	Sharon n=18	total n=46
Status	Undergraduate	13	9	16	38
	Graduate	1	1	1	3
	Not a student	3	1	1	5
Age	19-24	11	9	13	33
	25-40	5	2	2	9
	Unknown	1	—	3	4
Cycle at the uni.	First cycle	8	2	8	18
	Second cycle	5	6	6	17
	Unknown	—	1	2	3
Degree	Chemistry	1	5	10	16
	Economics	11	—	—	11
	Fine arts	1	—	—	1
	History	—	2	—	2
	Physics	1	2	6	9
	Unknown	—	1	1	2
Work	Full-time	4	3	2	9
	Part-time	2	4	—	6
	Does not work	11	4	16	31
Foreign lang. at second. school	English	13	1	13	27
	French	4	10	5	19
Language School	new students	7	10	9	26
	cont. students	10	1	9	20

Mark's class stands out from the other two for another reason. Almost all students from that class had not studied English in their secondary education. Instead, they had taken French as the foreign language. For almost all students in Mark's class this was not their first class at the university Language School. In contrast, Bob's and Sharon's classes had a relevant number of students who had studied English in secondary school. In these two classes there was about the same number of students "new" to the school as there were continuing students from a previous year.

Throughout the study students are referred to with numbers (L1, L2 etc.) and occasionally with fictitious names to preserve their identity.

3.5. THE TEACHERS

Three teachers (Bob, Mark and Sharon²) teaching a level three class at the Language School¹ were approached to get their permission to observe and later on record their classes through the academic year 91-92. The following is some biographical information about them.

Bob was in his late twenties in October 91. He was from Great Britain and was fluent in Spanish with some knowledge of Catalan. He got a Bachelor of Science in Economics and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (a one-year full-time degree) specializing in ESL. He had been teaching English for 4 years when the data was collected, mainly to adults. For a short period of time, he also taught Spanish in Great Britain. 91-92 was going to be his third

² Teachers have been given fictitious names to preserve their identity.

year at the Language School at the University and he was involved in the production of materials for learner training.

Mark was in his forties. He was also from Great Britain and could speak Spanish. He had a doctorate in History. He had been teaching English for nine years and it was four years since he first started working at the Language School at the University. He had had no formal training in ESL besides in-service seminars given at the Language School at the University. In 91/92 he was also teaching an introductory course on Spanish history and culture to American students attending the University.

Sharon was in her mid-thirties at the time the data was collected. She was from Britain and could speak Spanish. She majored in Environmental Science (B.S.). Most of her teaching experience had been in teaching English as a foreign language in the city where the data was collected, where she had taught for nine years. The first five years she was at well-known private language schools. It had been four years now since she started working at the Language School at the University. She got all her formal training in teaching English in Spain. While working at private language schools, she took the RSA certificate and regular in-service courses. Later on, she herself started leading these seminars. During the year the data was collected, she gave a presentation on a professional meeting for teachers. A year after the data was collected, Sharon decided to leave the profession as an EFL instructor temporarily, both for personal reasons and because she had the impression that she was getting tired of it, even though she recognized she had enjoyed being an English teacher for many years.

3.6. SELECTION OF SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

Choosing the Language School at the University as the site of my investigation came as a natural decision because I had been teaching one course there for the previous two academic years. Having been part of the staff myself worked to my advantage in various ways. I was familiar with the school's system and, to a certain extent, had some knowledge of the type of students taking courses there. Maybe most crucial was the fact that the teachers already knew me as a colleague, and they would probably be less threatened by my presence in their classes than if I had been a complete outsider, especially if one considers that observation was not a regular practice at the school.

However, choosing a familiar setting is not usually recommendable for an interpretative study for various reasons (Webb and Glesne, 1992, p. 793):

- Familiarity: Being too familiar with the setting can make the discovery process difficult.
- Role bias: When a teacher/researcher observes another teacher, the observed teacher may try to get the observer to help him, to take the role of teacher.
- Role conflict: When a teacher is the researcher, he may bring with himself his own vested interests as teacher.
- Dangerous knowledge: The information in the final report may put into danger the researcher's relationships with the people and places under study.

Aware of these difficulties, I still chose the Language School because even if the setting was familiar, there was a distance. First, I had never worked full-time there. Secondly, when the study was

conducted, I was not working at the school any longer. Third, the teachers I was going to observe knew me but there had not been a close relationship between us as professionals and I had never seen them teaching in the past.

I am going to turn now to explaining why I chose to study level three classes. Out of the seven levels being taught at the Language School, level three was preferred and selected because of two main reasons. Firstly, I felt that even if students were not beginners they might still need some help with how to manage their learning of English (learner training). Levels above level three did not seem as appropriate because the post-intermediate and advanced student may have fewer problems in the managing of language learning, having already attained a higher language proficiency. Secondly, at the time the data was collected, the school had sensed an increase in the demand for intermediate level courses and less of an interest in the beginners' classes³. If the school was to somehow benefit from the work I was about to start, it made more sense to work on a level with some potential for expansion.

As regards the choice of the classes to focus on, I sought advice from the coordinator of the English Department who suggested the schools of Physics and Economics, attendance there being more regular than in other schools. Bob, Sharon and Mark were the only teachers teaching at those schools. He also suggested

³ In 91/92 the school was offering twelve classes for level one, seventeen for level two, eighteen for level three, fifteen for level four, ten for "course point," seven for level five and two for level six.

a number of teachers he thought would be open to being observed. Among others, he suggested Bob and Sharon, but not Mark⁴.

3.7. ENTRY TO SITE

When I sought to gain the teachers' oral consent to observe their classes in early October, they reacted differently to my request although all of them accepted being observed. Sharon and Bob were very open to be observed ("Come when you want," journal, 17/9). Mark agreed but I felt some resistance at the same time. The first thing he said was that he was not sure he was the right person claiming that he was not too familiar with learner training and that he did not know how much he would integrate it into the course. He also said teaching English was not the only thing he did. Then he suggested that I visit the class for the first time one day when there was a discussion and his role was very secondary. In spite of this initial resistance, Mark always welcomed my presence every time I would visit the class and transmitted that to his students as well.

In asking the teachers' consent to visit them the only thing I told teachers was that I was interested in learner training. So if anything, they had the idea I was focusing on the learners. Soon after, when I changed my focus of study I did not make it known to the teachers because I thought that could make them too aware of how they structured tasks. So they were never told about the true focus of the study.

⁴ It remained unclear what criteria the coordinator applied in giving these referrals (personality, reputation, attitude towards school, availability etc).

Teachers had different reactions to this lack of information as regards what I was looking at when I went into their lessons. Mark and Bob never asked me what I was doing and seemed to get used to my presence easily. Sharon, on the other hand, showed curiosity towards what I was examining on several occasions during the year. She showed interest in looking at the transcripts and in reading my field notes. During class time she used to look at me once in a while, something the other two teachers did not do. One day after class she even expressed some frustration at not knowing what I was looking at. She said that if I did not tell her, she would not be able to help me.

As regards the students, I did not plan to formally introduce myself to them and left it to each teacher to do that. In fact, Mark told me not to introduce myself. This resulted in a general lack of information about me and possibly carried some disadvantages later on. One day I heard a student refer to me jokingly as "the spy." Aware of this, I would try to arrive early to class so that I had time to talk with students and they could familiarize with me.

This lack of information carried over when I started to audio record the lessons. Students were not told in advance about the microphones and on the first day of the recording they were not asked their consent either. Again this probably caused some resistance at first. Nevertheless, after hearing the recordings it seems that the resistance was only initial. Students soon forgot about the microphones as the lesson progressed.

3.8. SUMMARY

The participants in the study were teaching/learning English

at a language school at a major university in Spain. Three classes of an intermediate level of general English were chosen to be observed, two at the School of Physics and one at the School of Economics. The students were mostly undergraduates at the University, mostly pursuing a degree in Physics, Chemistry or Economics. The teachers, Bob, Mark and Sharon, were native speakers of English and had all taught for at least three years at the University Language School. Neither the teachers nor the students were told about the true focus of investigation.