

# The structuring of language-learning tasks

Elsa Tragant Mestres

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**THE STRUCTURING OF  
LANGUAGE-LEARNING TASKS**

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#### 4.10. THE USE OF HUMOR

This last section on the teacher's structuring deals with humor initiated by the teacher during the preparatory and wrap-up segments. First, different sources of laughter will be presented in the way of illustrations. Then students' reactions to these teachers' stimuli will be examined with a view to describing differences between teachers.

During the preparatory and wrap-up segments sometimes teachers tried to brighten up the students' faces with attempts to be funny, which students usually acknowledged through laughter or chuckles. Although humor during these segments is not something unique to these parts of the lesson, it is still interesting to see its use particularly at one of the times in the lesson where the teacher is clearly the main focus. In the present analysis only the attempts that were acknowledged by students (i.e., that is, when the students' reactions were picked up by the tape-recorder) have been taken into account.

The three teachers caused laughter or chuckles in students with different frequency. Mark did so five times, Bob seven and Sharon twenty. Mark initiated far less humorous utterances than the other two teachers, taking into account that his lessons were recorded almost twice as many hours as the other two teachers.

The three teachers used different resources to cause laughter, the most prominent of which will be presented here:

(a) The use of paralinguistic means was usual, especially for Sharon. Teachers would play with different tones of voice, they would breathe heavily, make use of mimicry, make noises with their mouth or sing, among others.

(b) Laughter was also achieved by asking students questions that were too easy or questions that had no answer, or by asking questions that required students to make wild guesses, or by asking questions that could theoretically hurt the teacher as a professional. Excerpt 88 is an example of this last type of questions.

• excerpt 88

- T Come back to me. Come back to me . . . All right . . . Come on, tell me. Have you enjoyed English?  
 M-L No. ((Whispering))  
 LL Yes. ((Chuckles)) / Ah yes.  
 T All right. You can be honest. (You don't have to say) the teacher wants to say yes.  
 LL ((Chuckles))

(Sharron, 13/5, 063)

(c) Teachers also imitated their students or a foreign language student in the abstract and that also caused some laughter as in excerpt 89, when Bob was concluding the preparatory segment:

• excerpt 89

- T So you all know what you are doing now?  
 LL Yes.  
 T Yes! ((Imitating students' low energy))  
 C Yes. ((Chuckles))  
 T Right OK fine. (Let's go then)

(1/4 078)

(d) The bringing forth of topics that the teacher knew students would enjoy because they were ongoing jokes in the class and/or because they were commonplace jokes in the community were also a source of humor in class. Excerpt 90 is one such illustration from Mark where he was trying to illustrate the meaning of the word "mean" by making reference to Catalans, meanness and "el Barça":



• excerpt 90<sup>18</sup>

- (1) T Listen. In (1.87) In Madrid . . . in Madrid,=  
 LL ((Laughter))  
 T =in Madrid,  
 L7 Where?
- (5) T In Madrid. [Madrid. ((Slowly articulated)) in Madrid . . . they say  
 ... =  
 L (((Hums a tune))  
 T =that the Catalans,=  
 C ((Loud laughter)) (.03)  
 (10) T =are mean.  
 C \_\_\_\_\_ (.03)  
 T [Right. OK? It's not true, of course. (I've got) a good example=  
 C \_\_\_\_\_  
 M XX
- (15) LL ((Laughter))  
 T [=a good example=  
 C \_\_\_\_\_  
 M Yeah lo ha pillao yeah.  
 LL ((Laughter))
- (20) M (Pa favor [pa favor)  
 T [=A good example where that's not true is because L13  
 just won a lot of money because Barça lost [and he's going to buy  
 us=  
 L14 [And and me too.
- (25) T =all a drink.  
 LL ((Laughter))  
 T [He's not mean. It's a proof. It's not true.  
 C \_\_\_\_\_  
 LL ((Laughter))
- (30) L14 (Quina) mentira.  
 T Right. Now, for example you choose mean. [right?  
 L13 ((OK))  
 LL ((Laughter))

(1/4 630)

There were other stimuli of laughter but they were not easily classifiable and it would not be productive to present them here.

I have purposefully chosen one excerpt from each teacher so far in order for the reader to appreciate the effect that each teacher's use of humor had in his students. By looking at the length of excerpt 88 from Sharon, excerpt 89 from Bob and excerpt 90

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<sup>18</sup> A continuous double line preceded by square brackets is used to indicate loud noise at a time when the teacher or a student had difficulty in making himself heard to the class.

from Mark, this last one stands out for its length. Often, Mark's stimuli would turn into long disruptions with:

- (a) background noise—see the double underlining indicating loud background noise from students— (lines 10-17);
- (b) several bursts of laughter (lines 2, 9, 15, 19, 26 and 29);
- (c) fake clarification requests (line 4) and
- (d) students adding their own jokes—humming (line 6), "yeah lo ha pillao yeah" (line 18) and "pa favor pa favor" (line 20) with an accent from the South of Spain meant to cause laughter.

Disruption in excerpt 90 was so that when Mark wanted to move on (line 31) the students were still laughing (line 33). In some way his own jokes would turn against him or "drown" him in such a way that it was difficult to go back and retake the thread of the lesson.

A similar phenomenon occurred again in excerpt 91. This was a time when the teacher explained how they would correct a task and purposefully started correcting it in an opposite way from how he had said the task would be corrected, in what seemed to be an attempt on the part of the teacher to be funny:

• excerpt 91

- (1) T *Listen.* (.04) Francisco . . . OK. And I am- want you to indicate . . . which is correct. OK? We should vote democratically . . . decide which is correct. Right? Now remember this short story the narrative begins six o'clock. . . Right? Yesterday . . . (evening).  
 (5) All right? He arrived at six o'clock *and* found. . . found. . . was finding? ((Writes answer on blackboard)) Good. All right.  
 C ((Chuckle))

(4/12 522)

The teacher's joke was acknowledged by the students' chuckling (line 7). But then the students started playing their particular joke back on him. Mark did not intend to give all the answers to the students but when he started asking for contributions without

nominating students, these purposefully "boycotted" him by not volunteering an answer on several occasions. In the end the teacher saw himself forced to start nominating students.

In contrast, Sharon's and Bob's attempts to be funny did not cause any disruption in class and the teachers never lost control in the way it was lost in Mark's class.

The use of humor by the teacher is probably something that has much to do with his personality. Also the teacher's background could have an effect with the use of humor. Sharon had had some training in drama and she was the teacher who caused students' laughter more often (especially through paralinguistic means). Another intervening factor could have to do with the students' reactions. It could be argued that maybe the fact that Mark's attempts to be funny tended to be longer than he would have wanted to could have been a factor discouraging him from initiating humorous comments more often.

In a few words, Sharon's talk when structuring language-learning tasks was considerably more humorous than Bob's and even more so than Mark's. The reasons for this may be various, some having to do with teachers' presage variables, some having to do with the interactive process of teaching (more concretely with whether the reactions to these humorous utterances could be kept under control).



## **CHAPTER 5: STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION AND INTERPRETATION IN STRUCTURING**

Sections 5.1. and 5.2. aim at describing what students said and did when the teachers were structuring language-learning tasks, that is to say, the aim is learner talk mainly during the preparatory and wrap-up segments. The recording captured two types of learner talk going on in the preparatory and wrap-up segments. One was public talk, that is, the communication meant to be audible to the whole class, especially the teacher usually. The other was side-talk, that is, the communication meant to be audible to peers sitting nearby. In keeping in with this division between public and side-talk, they will be described separately in this chapter.

Because of the limitations in the recording of the lessons, systematic comparisons between students' participation in public and side-talk in the three classes has been difficult most of the times. The reader will remember that only a group of students (from two to four) was recorded per lesson (and the group recorded varied each time). Also, the fact that Bob's class was considerably

bigger in size than Sharon's and Mark's made student participation in that class difficult to capture on the tape recorder at times. For these reasons, the description of students in sections 5.1 and 5.2. is, for the most part, going to be general. Only when differences between classes are overt will these be pointed out.

The third and last section (5.3.) deals with the times when students carried out tasks in a way that the teacher had not intended initially and this deviant performance was not due to lack of understanding of what needed to be done.

### **5.1. STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC TALK**

When teachers were structuring tasks, students participated in the discourse mainly by: (a) asking questions, (b) showing understanding and readiness, (c) responding to the teacher's questions (other than those checking understanding) and (d) collectively reacting with laughter to what the teacher or other students said or did. The present section will consist of the description of items (a), (b) and (d), while item (c) will not be considered because it was commented on in some sections from chapter 4 (4.5., 4.7. and 4.8.). In item (a) there is an analysis of students asking questions with a special focus on when questions are posed. In item (b) there is a general account of students' displays of understanding and an attempt to interpret what these displays really mean. Item (d) identifies several types of sources of laughter and looks at how these incidents develop in the conversation with an interest in seeing how teachers react to them.

(a) Asking questions

Students asked questions about the procedure as well as the language. Especially in procedural questions, there was a tendency in some students to avoid asking them during the preparatory segment. This same observation was made by Bob who reported having experimented with instruction-giving. He told me he had tried distributing the material for a game without giving any instructions to see if students asked what they were supposed to do. He said that students never asked any questions, although the game made no sense without instructions (field note, 28/10 p. 13).

In general, when a student had a question sometimes he first addressed it to a peer and only when the doubt was not cleared up, did he turn to the teacher. For example, in the preparatory segment of 1/4 task 1, L13 asked L8 if there was any rule to know where the stress of a list of words on the blackboard fell. Later on, when Mark was about to release students to work on their own, L18 posed the same question to the teacher in order to clear up the doubt (see excerpt 92):

• excerpt 92

- T Right. And now I'm going to play it again and we listen see if we hear- (.27)  
 L8 It's always true?  
 T What is always true?  
 L8 That rule.

(1/4 540)

At times students did not ask questions during the preparatory segment, waiting until after the teacher released them to work on the task. Then they addressed the teacher on a group-to-one or one-to-one basis. There were cases where students posed the questions right after being released while at other times the students posed the questions some time later. This was the case in

7/4 039 where a student asked a procedural question 3'44" after students had been released by Sharon.

At other times the student addressing the question was one that had been nominated by the teacher to give an answer. This is what happened in excerpt 93, where L13 asked Mark a procedural question in response to a teacher's question when he approached L13's group (see underlining):

• excerpt 93

- T-G     OK? What did you choose? OK?  
 L13-T   But we can choose the person?  
 T-L13   No, no. You write the question and then you ask everybody=  
 L        (Ah, vale.)  
 T-L13   =to find out who is the most and who is the least.  
 L?       Vale.  
 T-L13   You understand?  
 L8-T     Every person eh choose (an adjective).  
 T        Yes.  
 L13      But XXX if we choose the same.  
 T        It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because they won't ask necessarily the same questions.

(1/4 720)

The following is an additional example of a student asking a question in response to the teacher's question. This time, however, Mark was addressing the whole class in a correction stage:

• excerpt 94

- T        Ok. Let's have a look. L6, em where can you see bricks? Can you see any bricks in a picture? . . . Bricks.  
 L6      In Spanish?

(23/3 286)

Probably if Mark had not posed a question to L13's group in excerpt 93 and to L6 in excerpt 94, those two students would not have asked these questions on procedure.

Then in the data there were a couple of instances of apparent questions on procedure that, upon analysis, do not seem to be real questions. For instance, in a reporting stage which was introduced



by stressing the fact that interruptions were welcome (see excerpt 95), a student started his intervention by asking permission to step into the peer's presentation with an apparent question on procedure (see excerpt 96):

• excerpt 95

T Now if you got any criticism of this plan or if you've got any questions to ask . . . like what will happen if x sits here . . . please ask.

(Bob, 26/3 269)

• excerpt 96<sup>1</sup>

L4 If we put . . . here Mrs Chasuble (.06) ((Writing initials)) next to the Judge Masters, eh they will have peace because that Judge Masters is very tactful and the Mrs Chasuble had man- table manners.

L14 Bob

(.01)

L14 Bob

T And Mrs Chasuble has had table manners.

T Yeah?

L14 Can you refuse (w.p.) refuse the plan?

T Can you refuse the plan? You can say what you want about the plan, you know. You can make comments on it.

(26/3 1430)

The other case occurred when a student (L7) asked a procedural question (whether the exercise had to be done in pairs), not because of lack of this information (the instructions were written on the blackboard and the class was working in pairs at the time the question was posed) but because she probably found it odd to prepare a survey in pairs and she must have wanted to check with Mark. An indicator that she did not really need to have an answer or that she was just seeking reassurance is that after she

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<sup>1</sup> A transcription with two columns has been used to distinguish public talk from side-talk when the two coexisted or when two simultaneous conversations in side-talk were recorded.

failed to get the teacher's attention, she herself answered her doubt:

• excerpt 97

L7-T In pairs? In pairs?

Mark . . . in pairs.

L7-LL Si, no?

L7-T In pairs? No? (Bé suposo que sí) ((Self talk)).

((The teacher is with L9 who has asked him if they can choose adjectives from outside the book))

(1/4 693)

Sometimes, however, real questions were not answered by any peer and they were not addressed to the teacher later on, either. Thus, doubts remained. This is what happened on 4/11 where a group of students did not know for sure whether they were supposed to do one or the two parts of a handout. One member of the group asked another neighboring group but they did not know either. Nevertheless, neither of the two groups ever turned to the teacher to resolve that (Mark, field note p. 10).

#### (b) Showing understanding

Sometimes the displays of understanding were explicitly prompted by the teacher (through full questions like "Do you all know what you are doing now?," "Is that clear?," "Do you understand?" or just one word prompts like "Aha?," "OK?," "Yeah?") and at others they were just initiated by the learners (i.e., "back channel work"). All too often, in the data these less explicit prompts received no audible verbalization on the part of the students, which makes me think that a lot of the displays that had to do with understanding must have been visual (body posture and movement, gaze, facial expression) or were not audible to the tape recorder. On the other hand, when displays were audible, they also

often took the form of one-word responses such as "vale," "yes," "OK," "aha," "mhm."

By saying "OK" or "ah" students said they understood and this was actually the most common type of display. But there was one occasion where understanding was shown instead (see underlining):

• excerpt 98

- T First thing is to choose an adjective. [Choose an adjective.  
 L7 And the third? . . . Don't  
tell them what your adjective is?  
 T [Right. That's right. So when I ask  
 you- I don't say I'm asking about=  
 L7 Yes.  
 T =mean.  
 L7 My name is Angels. My adjective is mean. [Do you ever bring?  
 T [That's right. Exactly  
 not that.  
 LL Yeah. /Yeah. /Yeah. /Yeah.

(Mark, 1/4 685)

In excerpt 98, L7 skillfully "completed" or "rephrased" the teacher's instructions when he was summarizing them towards the end of the preparatory segment, thus taking a more active role than what was customary for students during the preparatory and wrap-up segments. Maybe what contributed to L7 taking the lead in the summary is the fact that the instructions for this task were the only ones written on the blackboard out of the eighteen recorded lessons.

At times during the students' "back channel work" during the preparatory segment, students seemed to simply communicate that the teacher may continue or that they were ready to start a task rather than communicating full understanding of the procedure of the task being presented. This is clear in excerpt 98 where the instructions received numerous displays of readiness (L L Yeah./Yeah./Yeah./Yeah.) but then during the performance of the task, students showed that they still had several questions on the

nature of the activity: a student was not sure about the class configuration, another about the restrictions on the content, and still another about who the addressee of the performance would be. These questions show that displays of readiness did not always imply full understanding. This "phatic" purpose is even made more evident when one student told another in side-talk: "El fas felix," after the latter had replied: "No" to Bob's: "Anything you don't understand?" in the preparatory segment (field note 6/11 p. 18).

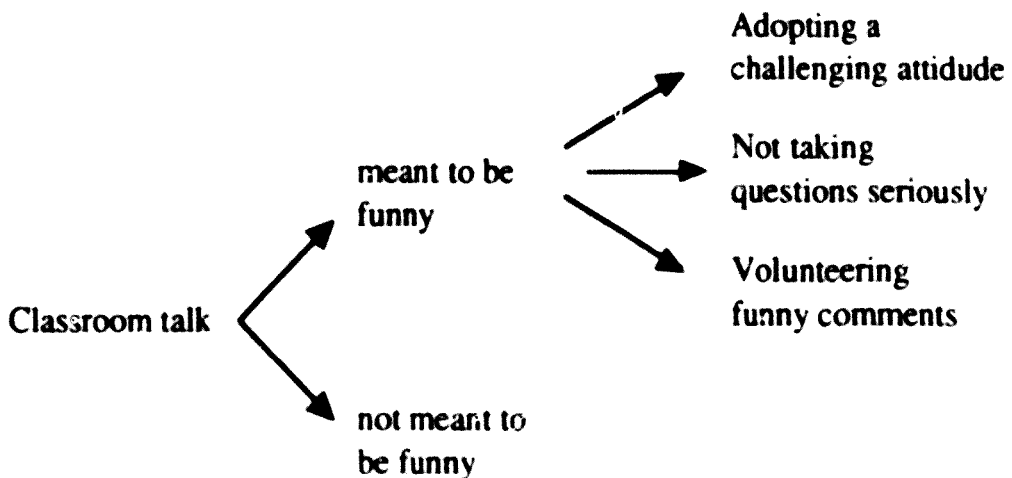
(c) Responding to the teacher's questions

See sections 5, 7 and 8 in chapter 4.

(d) Reacting

There were two main types of collective reactions of laughter which depended on who students reacted to: to what a student said or to what the teacher said. Reactions to teachers' humorous comments were described in 4.10.. As regards reactions to what a student said, four types of stimuli have been identified (see Figure 5). Sometimes a student said something with the primary purpose of causing laughter in his classmates. At others what a student said was not meant to be funny but was also a source of laughter and chuckles. I will deal with the former type of laughter first. In the data laughter from funny comments was achieved through three different means: (a) adopting a challenging attitude, (b) not taking questions seriously and (c) volunteering funny comments.

Figure 5

Types of stimuli of laughter(a) Adopting a challenging attitude

Sometimes laughter was caused by a student adopting a challenging, uncooperative attitude towards what the teacher said. These were cases where one or more students tried to contradict the teacher, or to make what he said sound nonsensical or to point out the teacher's mistakes. In excerpt 99, a student challenged the teacher on lines 5, 13 and 22:

• excerpt 99<sup>2</sup>

- (1) T Who has done exercise three?  
 LL ((Some students raise their hands))  
 T Yes? Who has learnt the verbs?  
 (.02)
- (5) F Learn?  
 LL ((Chuckles))  
 T I said do and learn. Did your learn them?  
 C (.05)

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<sup>2</sup> Students' attempts to be funny and their acknowledgement on the part of the class have been underlined. Teachers' attempts to be funny and the students' acknowledgement have been bold-typed.

- (10) .  
 T But you haven't learnt them.  
 L17 I'm not a computer.  
 T You are not a computer. [Neither am I.  
 (15) LL (((Laughter))  
 T But learning one, two, three, four, five (((Counting for himself))=  
 LL (((Laughter))  
 T =fifteen irregular verbs you don't have to be a  
 (20) computer.  
 L1 ((Laughter))  
 L17 Fifteen? Infinitive, infinitive past.  
 LL ((Laughter))

(Mark 23/3 185)

(b) Not taking questions seriously

At times laughter was caused by a student not responding to the teacher seriously. In excerpt 100, the way a student responded during linguistic structuring caused laughter in the students:

## • excerpt 100

- T All right. Eccentric. What does eccentric mean? do you know?  
 M No.  
 LL ((Laughter)) / XX.  
 T ((Laughs)) No, come on. What- what do you think it- what does eccentric mean? Any id-?

(Sharon, 25/3 012)

(c) Volunteering funny comments

At other times, laughter was caused by a student making funny personal comments that had not been requested and had little to do with what was going on in class. In excerpt 101, Mark had given students a model sentence for a task ("Do you often buy your friends presents?"). The incident occurred after a student had asked whether "buy your friends presents" was grammatical (line 3):

## • excerpt 101

- (1) L13 But buy your friends?

- T Presents.  
 L13 Not buy presents to your friends?  
 T → Ah! X presents for your friends is possible as well.  
 (5) L Is bad.  
 LL ((Laughter))

(1/4 678)

In excerpt 102, Mark had just been writing a grammar exercise for students to copy (for 2'53") and students were starting to do so, when the following incident occurred:

• excerpt 102

- (1) T OK? Here we have a story.  
 M I'm finished.  
 C ((Laughter))  
 T Never. Next week.  
 (5) LL ((Laughter))  
 T You see it's an unending story.  
 M (I can't believe you)  
 T The story starts at nine o'clock. [at six o'clock sorry, at six o'clock.  
 LL [((Loud laughter for .06))

(4/12 472)

On line 2, one student said he had finished when most students had just started copying and it was impossible that this student had finished, which is what caused the laughter.

Instances of students' acknowledgements of classmates' attempts to be funny have just been presented. The other major type of stimulus of laughter will be presented next. These were interventions which were not meant to be funny but also caused laughter in the class. Students' stimuli will be dealt with first. Next teachers' stimuli will be described.

Students' interventions caused laughter on occasions when a response to the teacher's questions during the preparatory segment was incorrect or unexpected. Excerpt 103 is an example of several students laughing at two students who gave incorrect responses (lines 2 and 7) to a question from Sharon during linguistic

structuring. At the time these incidents took place the teacher was trying to get students to characterize an imaginary character she had drawn on the blackboard:

• excerpt 103

- (1) T What do the villagers say about him? (.03)  
 M Very common.  
 LL ((Chuckles))  
 T Very common. What do you mean very common?  
 (5) M No. No.  
 T OK. What do they say about him?  
 F About forty.  
 LL (((Laughter)))  
 T (((Loud laughter))) All right. OK? He's middle-aged. Eh all right.  
 (10) ((Writing it on the blackboard)) OK?
- (25/3 103)

Students also laughed in excerpt 104, when Mark was giving feedback during the wrap-up segment of a role-play that a group of students had just presented. Several students laughed when Mark pointed out what the group had done wrongly:

• excerpt 104

- T The only problem was on the one hand of course you had to interrupt, but it's a problem if two people interrupt so much that the other person=  
 LL =(Chuckles)=  
 T Yeah.  
 .  
 .  
 T You don't need to introduce the situation.  
 LL ((Chuckles))  
 T No.[XXX  
 LL (((Chuckles)))  
 T It's not necessary.
- (13/5 826)

I will now turn to students' reactions to what the teachers said and was not originally and primarily meant to be funny. In excerpt 105, the students did not take Sharon seriously when she was introducing a reading passage:



## • excerpt 105

- (1) T Read it through, get the general idea. . . . don't read the last line.  
 LL Oh!  
 T Oh! ((Chuckles))  
 LL ((Chuckle))
- (5) T Don't read the last line.  
 F Seguro.  
 T Don't read the last line ((Uttered more slowly)).

(5/3 395)

Something similar happened in a wrap-up segment of a vocabulary game (see excerpt 106) which was not carried out as the teacher intended. When Sharon gave her initial idea of the game in the wrap-up segment, students joked a little with her comments:

## • excerpt 106

- (1) T OK. All right. We'll finish there. You- what you said was in the house again. We could have gone sort of like mirror, reflection, scene, wind.  
 LL **Oh! / Oh!** / ((Chuckles))
- (5) T **And it could have been so romantic, you know.**  
**[House, door, windows, table.**  
 LL ((Chuckles))

(31/3 568)

Teachers did not always react in the same way to these incidents (both those meant to be funny and those which were not). Sometimes they acknowledged the joke and joined the students in the laughter and joked with them, as in excerpts 105 (lines 3 and 7) and 106 (lines 5-6). At others, especially when students laughed at a student's earnest answer to a teacher's question, the teacher did not usually join the rest of the students as in excerpt 107, when Mark was going over a quick correction in the wrap-up segment (see bold type):

## • excerpt 107

- T Right now, L5 how do you say . . . por ejemplo in English?

- L5 ¿Por ejemplo?  
 T Yeah. Per exemple. Por ejemplo.  
 L5 Sorry.  
 T Eh?  
 M Sorry. XX. ((Imitating L5))  
 Fx-L5 Que lo digas.  
 Fy-L5 Que ho diguis XX.  
 M-L5 Dilo, dilo X.  
 T Por ejemplo. How do you say per exemple?  
 L5 ((Chuckles))  
 T In English.  
 L5 In English?  
 T Yes.  
 L5 (.04) ¿Por ejemplo?  
 LL (((Loud laughter)))  
 T [You said lot of times XX.  
 LL ((Loud laughter))  
 L5 For example.  
 T OK X. You kept saying for example, which is very common. Everyone does this. Lots of people do this. OK. It's for example, isn't it? (You were thinking probably in Catalan it's per exemple).  
 LL Per exemple / Per exemple.  
 T OK? (Remember) it's exam ple. (((Writing phonetic transcription)))  
 LL [Example. / Example. / Exam  
 exam ple.  
 T OK? Example.

(13/5 1122)

By saying that the pronunciation problem was a common mistake in excerpt 107, Mark was probably giving support to L5 as a reaction to all the laughter this student was being exposed to.

At times, teachers responded to the student who provoked the laughter with another "joke," in a way "attacking" him back. Then the student could react back by attempting to cause laughter in the students again. Good illustrations of this alternation are excerpts 99 and 102, where the teacher's attempts to "attack" back are printed in bold type. In excerpt 99, a student challenged the teacher on lines 5, 13, and 22 and the teacher challenged him back on lines 14-20. The rest of the class, as spectators, acknowledged these two participants' interventions through laughter on lines 6, 13, 16, 18 and 21. In excerpt 102, a student challenged the teacher on lines 2 and 7, this last one being quite successful—it caused loud laughter.

The rest of the class acknowledged the jokes through laughter on lines 3, 5, 9 and 10.

Finally, teachers did not always respond to the students' challenges. There were times where the teacher just ignored the students' attempts to be funny as in excerpt 101.

Up to now the description has been general without trying to differentiate the behavior of students or the teachers from one class to another. However, differences have been found between Mark's and Sharon's classes where a sufficient number of reactions of laughter took place. The few number of reactions in public talk recorded in Bob's class could be a characteristic of this class or it could be due to the less appropriate recording conditions found in the classroom. For this reason, his class will not be contrasted with Mark's and Sharon's.

The total amount of times where what the teacher or a student said or did caused some laughter or chuckles is higher in Sharon's class (seventeen) than in Mark's (nineteen), if we take into account the higher number of hours recorded in Mark's class. However, what seems to be significant is the distribution of types of reactions (see Table 18).

In Mark's class, the reactions were on many occasions disruptive, an effect that was absent in the students' reactions in Sharon's class. Several reasons have led me to draw this distinction between the two classes. In the first place, in Mark's class there was a higher number of instances of laughter caused by students adopting a challenging attitude towards the teacher (see Table 18). These types of reactions showed a more non-cooperative attitude on the part of the students than the other types.

Table 18

Number of students' reactions of laughter in public talk per type and teacher

Types of reactions	Teacher	
	Mark	Sharon
Reactions to students' interventions meant to be funny:		
- by adopting a challenging attitude	6	1
- by not taking questions seriously	—	2
- by volunteering funny comments	6	1
Reactions to students' interventions NOT meant to be funny	4	8
Reactions to teacher talk	3	5
-----		
Total number of reactions	19	17

Additionally, in Mark's class the duration of some jokes and their acknowledgement was longer. There were several bursts of laughter and usually one joke by a student was followed by others by this same student, other students and the teacher. The "festive" climate was such that sometimes Mark had problems in getting the

students back to go on with the lesson. These stretches of humor in the classroom resulted in long asides and a fragmentation of the flow of the lesson. In some way, the class got out of hand at times, as in excerpt 108 where the teacher on line 24 had difficulty in continuing his instructions and had to make noise to signal to students that the time for jokes had finished. Instructions have been underlined so that the reader sees they are fragmented:

• excerpt 108

- (1) T Now the information (02) the information . . . for this composition is here in this page. If you look here you are going to get information from the map . . . from the pictures. (02) from the tape recording. ((Chuckles))
- (5) F [No!  
T No? Yes no. Because there is no tape recorder=  
LL Yeah.  
T =because we have lost the key to the cupboard=  
F Bien.
- (10) T =So there is no tape recorder. No, bien no. No bad.  
F [Very good English.  
T [So am I.  
LL ((Chuckling))  
T [I'm going to be the tape recorder.
- (15) LL ((Laughter))  
M-L Se pone el cassette en la boca y XX.  
T [Exactly.  
C (((Laughter)))  
T From the grammar exercise. (03) and from the teacher . . . who is me. I am the teacher.
- (20) LL ((Chuckles)) / Oh hello. / XX / ((General murmur))  
T [What a surprise!=  
LL [What's your name. / ((General murmur))  
T [=Right. OK. So.
- (25) LL (((Laughter)))  
M [What's your name  
LL ((Loud laughter))  
T What's my name yeah?  
LL ((Increased laughter))
- (30) T Very good yes. So first ((Simultaneously making noise with something)) first, the first thing I want you to do is do the grammar exercise.

(4/12 049)

In contrast, in Sharon's class there was usually one burst of laughter per incident and students rarely tried to continue with a joke over several turns. For example in excerpt 109, the teacher cut

off a student (see underlining) who intended to be funny with a challenge to the teacher. Probably as a consequence of ignoring him, this student did not attempt to answer back. This happened when the class was playing a word game and that student gave a wrong answer:

• excerpt 109

M    ¿Por qué no  
 LL    ((Chuckles))  
 T    What do you mean no?  
 L    ((Chuckles))

(25/3 002)

There is one more aspect that caused Mark's class to stand out. Students in this class were more aggressive from the point of the analysis of discourse during these incidents. They often interrupted the teacher or spoke at the same time as him. On these occasions, students seemed to be treating the teacher as an equal. This was further evidenced by the students' use of informal language and the use of the L1 addressed to Mark to sound even funnier (e.g., "No salen las cuentas" 23/3 809; "Qué bollo!" 1/4 682; "I can't believe you" 4/12 472). This symmetry of power in the discourse contrasted with the way students managed to get turns to make these funny comments. Then students "cunningly" followed the rules of asymmetry of power (they were polite, so to say). It was once they got the turn that they treated the teacher as an equal. The strategies students used to get turns were several. Students would mask their ironies under question form without really intending to ask anything (see excerpt 99 line 5 ). Or they would ask the teacher to repeat what students would later on make fun of, in this way making the object of laughter more prominent, as in excerpt 110 (see underlining):

## • excerpt 110

- T Listen. You are going to write a composition . . . about Marco Polo. ((The proper name is uttered very carefully))  
 LL About? / Què? / Com?  
 T Marco Polo.  
 LL ((Laughter))  
 T All right?=  
 F =But  
 LL ((Still laughing))

(4/12 048)

On other occasions, the students pleaded to get a turn with "please, please" or by raising their hands.

In contrast, students' in Sharon's class did not show asymmetry of power in the discourse and did not use the above surreptitious strategies that students in Mark's class used to get a turn.

In short, some attempts to be funny served to relieve tension and create or maintain a good classroom climate and teacher-student rapport (especially in Sharon's class). But the way some other attempts to be funny were handled (especially in Mark's class) had the opposite effect of causing disruption and blocking a smooth progress of the lesson.

## 5.2. SIDE-TALK DURING STRUCTURING

While the teachers structured language learning tasks, students were sometimes engaged in side-talk. This talk was at times related to the task the teacher was introducing or concluding, but sometimes it was not. First I will describe the students' side-talk that was task-related and then I will go on to describe the side-talk unrelated to the task at hand. I have limited the analysis to the resonance the teacher's structuring had on students' side-talk and have not analyzed the talk among students used to organize and maintain group work (utterances like "You write, OK?" or "Bueno. Cadascú que es vagi prenent notes").

### 5.2.1. Task-related side-talk

As regards task-related side-talk, students engaged in it during the preparatory and wrap-up segments mainly by: (a) showing lack of understanding, (b) answering questions posed by other learners, (c) making verbal displays of attentiveness, (d) making facilitating and inhibiting comments and (e) being funny. This section will consist of describing these five students' behaviors. Some of these functions coincide with those described in the section on public talk, like items (a), (b) and (e), while items (c) and (d) were not present in public talk. Items (a) and (b) will be dealt with together since they form a unit in interaction.

#### (a) Showing lack of understanding and (b) Answering questions

Students showed that they had not understood the procedure given by the teacher for a task or had doubts about the language



either by asking questions to peers ("¿De qué va esto?" 31/3 512; "Què hem de fer? Un plano amb aquesta X, no?" 23/3 394) or by simply commenting on their lack of understanding ("Això no ho he entès" Mark 23/3 347; "No entenc què està fent" Mark 1/4 698). Students were usually effective in responding to these questions. In excerpt 111, the long and collective responses that L12's question received (see bold type) have been printed in full in order to point out the students' capacity and skill at explaining what the task was about. The following conversation took place right after students had been released to work on the task:

• excerpt 111

- L1 I don't understand. Who do you ask for a for a . . . ?  
 L2 **Yes, when you have a problem, and X=**  
 L1 **=who do you ask.**  
 L2 **Yes. Who who you explain your problem.**  
 (.03)  
 L12 **Què és advice?**  
 L2 **Advice is . . . =**  
 L1 **Help more or less?**  
 L2 **Yes. I have a problem and I explain my problem to you.**  
 L12 **Vale. [Comencem?**  
 L2 **[And you: yes you say: I think you should. (.07) Es això. ((Showing the exercise))**  
 L12 **Vale. Comencem. Perquè . . . ((Chuckles))**  
 L2 **Vale. (.03) I often ask my wife for advice ((Reading example sentences from the book))**  
 L12 **Mhm.**  
 L2 **I sometimes I ask my mother for advice. ((Reading from the book))**  
 (.08)  
 L1 **Well, is about you you explain who you ask and she said what?**  
 L12 **Eh?**  
 L1 **Eh this exercise is eh for eh to say who you who do you ask and why.=**  
 L2 **=When you have problem.**  
 L12 **Ah!**  
 L2 **For example, in my work when I have a problem I ask eh my director for advice.**

(8/4 075)

It is interesting to note the thoroughness of these students' explanations and their similarity with Sharon's instructions

preceding that excerpt, thus the students' capacity for mimicking the teacher. Other aspects that excelled in the above excerpt of side-talk were the students' ability to modify speech in order to clarify the word "advice" as well as how fluently they cooperated with each other in giving a "collective" response. A proof that Sharon was well aware of the students' capacity for giving instructions is excerpt 112, where Sharon refused to repeat them and addressed the student who had shown lack of understanding to a peer:

• excerpt 112

T Read this little bit and try and write three to four questions to discover exactly what the sequence of events was. Yeah? Is that clear?

LL Yes. / Si. / ((Some murmur))

T Yeah. OK? Apart from there, but you are the only person going /bæ/ So you can explain Imma. Because you didn't go /bæ/ ((Chuckles)). All right. Let's go down: ehm two, two, two, three, three, three, three. Yeah? So you work with-, (go) backwards. Right ((Claps once)). You've got five minutes. Off you go.

(5/3 061)

However, this was only one of the few cases where a teacher arranged for a student to explain the procedure of a task to another student.

One additional observation is in order. On a few occasions, students were recorded reading the written instructions from the textbook or from handouts out loud to themselves, even though in none of the commercial materials the teachers used did they call the students' attention to these instructions in print.

The causes for the doubts and lack of understanding displayed by students both in side-talk and public talk could be various. The student could have been inattentive when the teacher was giving the information. In fact, in posing one such question a student from Sharon's class made this explicit (see excerpt 113):

## • excerpt 113

- T Try and make it into a little story, yeah? and try to use your imagination a little bit, yeah? OK? . . . Yeah? Off you go. One two three four, one two three four. (Shall we?) Just do it organization like, (as you know).
- L ((Chuckles))
- L11 ¿Qué XX? ¿Qué ha dicho que no estaba atento?
- L2 XX. Que comencis a enrollar-te una mica amb el teu X. Digues, oh!

(8/4 504)

Generally speaking the more general a question was, the more likely it seemed to be due to inattentiveness. The perfect synchronization of some of these questions right before the teacher finished the preparatory segment, as in the previous excerpt, was a recurrent feature in these questions—which shows the inattentiveness was “under control” to some extent.

Another possible cause for students asking questions (especially when these were less general) may have had its roots in the poor listening or linguistic skills of the students. This seemed to be the case in excerpt 111 where L12 did not know or recognize the word “advice,” which was a key concept in those instructions during the preparatory segment.

It is also clear from excerpt 114 that for some students (in this case L13 and L14, probably the weak ones) it was not odd to rely heavily on other students (in this case L17) for interpretations of teacher talk in the preparatory and wrap-up segments:

## • excerpt 114

L14-L7 Però que hem de fer? Encara no m'he enterat.

L13 No entenc que està fent.

L14 (Tu tampoc) no entens res. (((Chuckling)))

L13 [Bueno, a veure.

L14 Els ja sabran de què va.

(1/4 696)

Interestingly enough, in the previous task, L14 had also repeatedly sought help from her partner (L7) through "desperate" comments like: "No en tinc ni flors jo d'això", "Ai, és que no entenc res. T'ho prometo." which make me think of her as a poor student<sup>3</sup>. In fact, previously in that lesson L14 had addressed L7 jokingly as the teacher (L14-L7 Què hem de fer senyoreta?).

Finally one last cause for a student showing lack of comprehension could be the fact that he did not make some of the inferences from the teacher's structuring talk that the teacher expected him to make. These cases were commented on in section 4.2.1..

(c) Making verbal displays of attentiveness

These were cases where what the students said, unrequested, showed that they were paying attention and following the teacher's structuring talk. At times students answered public questions privately, as in this question posed by Sharon:

• excerpt 115

T What type of adverb is  
carefully, gently?

L2-L12 The modal.

L12 Ves a saber.

L2 ((Chuckles))

LL Modal. / Modal. / Modal.

(8/4 119)

On other occasions, the students' side-talk showed that they were processing or following the teacher's talk. Here is an illustration of a side conversation between L2 and L12 on the position of the adverbs during linguistic structuring:

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<sup>3</sup> <sup>3</sup> L14 never took the final exam either in June or in September and L7 got the second best grade in the class.

## • excerpt 116

- T So you've got frequency adverbs which go before the principal verb, before the main verb and then you've got adverbs of manner which go after, yeah? not after the verb after the verb plus the complement or the subject, yeah? (.04) So you have to be a little bit careful with where you put adverbs in English.
- L2-L12 The clause.  
 L12 After the de tot. no?  
 L2 Mhm?  
 L12 After the- com es diu frase clause?  
 L2 At the end. no?  
 L12 Mhm.

(Sharon, 8/4 122)

An example of a running interpretation while Sharon was giving instructions comes from the preparatory segment in 8/4 task 4:

## • excerpt 117

- T Come and sit on a chair, L5.  
 And you are so quiet and shy,  
 and I'm horrible. Come and  
 sit on the chair.
- L5 ((Sits at the front of the  
 class))
- L2 Què vol fer? XXX?  
 L12 XXX
- T-L5 Now you don't know what  
 your problem is, yes? So  
 from the advice they give  
 you, you have to try and  
 guess what your problem is  
 ... OK?
- L2 Ah. no ho sap?  
 M Ah. no ho sap? Bueno.  
 ((Chuckles))
- T-C [So she doesn't know what  
 her problem is.
- LL (((Chuckles)))
- T-L5 I'm going to write your  
 problem on the blackboard.  
 So you just ((Turns back to  
 write the problem on the  
 bb))
- L2-L12 Ah. vale. Ja deia jo. Perquè  
 si no.

(Sharon 8/4 421)

In the data there were also a few comments on the part of the students that were tinted with some criticism over what the

teacher was doing (such as the last utterance between L2 and L12 in excerpt 117).

(d) Making facilitating and inhibiting comments

Comments that seemed to reflect an attitude on the part of the student that would potentially nurture performance have qualified as facilitating comments. In contrast, comments that reflected an attitude on the part of the student that could hinder the student's potential have qualified as inhibiting comments. These comments could refer to the type of task, its contents or language focus.

As regards facilitating comments the most common one was mentioning that a task was easy. There were times when this was addressed to another student and times when this was self talk. However, the number of this type of facilitating comments was a minority in comparison with their counterparts. A total of four and seventeen facilitating and inhibiting comments from students were identified respectively from the three classes.

Among the inhibiting comments, there were those expressing dislike. For example, in Sharon's 8/4 389, a student said "No m'agrada gens" while the teacher was presenting the modal verb "ought to" during the preparatory segment. At other times, the expressions of lack of enthusiasm came in the form of one-word exclamations like "Oh no," "Ala!," "Uff!," "Oh horror." These short responses made it impossible to know sometimes what exactly "bothered" students, whether it was the topic or the type of task or a combination of factors. For example, in 31/3 248 students reacted with "Oh" when Sharon announced that students were going to write a recipe for gazpacho. It remains unclear whether students were reacting against the fact that they were made to write or that

they were made to work on a recipe or both. At times the students later on were more explicit as to what provoked this rejection, as in excerpt 118 where the panic from L7, when Sharon introduced a vocabulary game, seemed to stem from a self-perception that he was not good at vocabulary:

• excerpt 118

L7       ¿De qué va esto?  
 L6       Del joc aquell de sempre.  
 L7       Ah, horror.  
 L6       (Sí) ((Chuckles))  
 F        No.  
 (.02)  
 L7       I don't know vocabulary.

(31/3 512)

Two observations are in order in reference to inhibiting comments. Even though their number is much higher than the number of facilitating comments, this type of reaction may not be representative of all students and may just be reflecting the attitude of the few students that were recorded with the cordless microphone. I am saying this because in a lesson one same student expressed five inhibiting comments (Sharon 13/5 017, 112, 407, 412 and 508). It also happened that the same task got a facilitating comment from a student and an inhibiting one from another (Sharon 31/3 248 and 252).

(d) Being funny

Similarly to when students tried to make jokes and provoke a smile or laughter in the rest of the class in public talk, here individual students with their comments in side-talk also sought to get chuckles and laughter from those sitting nearby. Here is an example where a student probably gave a wrong response knowingly, just for the sake of being funny:

• excerpt 119

T What does mean mean?

L7 ¿Significar?

L13 El entendido

LL ((Laughter))

(Mark, 1/4 630)

See excerpt 115 for another example.

### 5.2.2. Side-talk unrelated to the task

I will now turn to the second part of this section on side-talk, that is, side-talk unrelated to the task at hand. Different types of side-talk will be identified and differences across students from different classes searched.

There were times where the class was "officially" in the preparatory or wrap-up segments and some students were "privately" engaged in something else. Sometimes some students started the task or started to get ready for the task before the teacher released the class from the preparatory segment. This phenomenon happened with the three teachers. On some occasions it can give the impression that the teacher was going on for too long in the preparatory segment and as a result students just started with the task before the teacher was finished. On other occasions, starting before the teacher had officially closed off the preparatory segment occurred when students seemed to feel excited about starting the task because it had some attractive component for them (usually this occurred in tasks where students were going to take an active part or when they were interested in the topic of the task). In excerpt 120, Sharon must have been aware of the likelihood of "losing" the students and intended to prevent it by saying (see underlining):



## • excerpt 120

T OK. Go back. . . . go back and have a look at what tenses they are using in the article. Yeah? First of all is it present?, is it past?, is it present perfect? Secondly, before you disappear from me. secondly . . . have a look, first what tenses, why.

(25/3 537)

We have just seen that students sometimes anticipated the teacher and started the task. There was another kind of anticipation that took place in the wrap-up segments. These were instances of students checking with neighboring students the answers of tasks that they had done for homework (or should have done for homework!), which would be corrected some time later during that lesson. For example, in the wrap-up segment of task 3 on 11/5, when Mark's class was on question time (that is, students had the chance of asking questions on a reading passage they had just corrected), two students started to discuss why the past of the word "open" did not double the consonant. It turned out that the word "open" came up in the following task and there "open" was also going to be an issue of public discussion. This type of anticipation only happened in Mark's class. This is reasonable since only in this class was the correction stage a very frequent activity<sup>3</sup> and students might have felt pressed because they were usually nominated during this stage.

Students not only anticipated the teacher, there were times when they ran behind him. It was not infrequent to have the teacher start the preparatory segment in the public sphere and have students privately still talk about some aspect of the task that the teacher had just "officially" concluded. This is what happened in excerpt 121 taking place between Mark's conclusion of the wrap-up

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<sup>3</sup> Out of a total number of twenty-five tasks in Mark's lessons, nineteen included a correction stage.

segment of a task (see bold type) and the start of the preparatory segment of the next:

• excerpt 121

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| L1 | They make us do?   |   |
| T  | Yes.   |   |
| L1 | Or to do?  |   |
| T  | No no. Do, always. Make you do. We've seen this . . . lots of times. More? (.02) Any more questions? (.09)       | L-L1 <u>XX. To do?</u>  |
| T  | L?   | L1-L <u>To do. Sí.</u>  |
| T  | <b>(.02) Right. OK . . . Now. (.05)</b>  | L-L1 <u>Em pensava que era el do. Do or to do? Què has posat?</u> |
|    |  | L1-L <u>Ara ho ha dit un altra cop. no?</u>                       |
|    |  | <u>Sense el to.</u>   |
| T  | I want you . . . before Wednesday to look again at page 25. Remember we've done these exercises during the year. | L-L1 <u>Vale, es que jo havia posat sense el to.</u>              |
|    |  | L1-L <u>Jo també. Es que amb el make el to no s'hi posa mai.</u>  |

(4/5 325)

Finally there was also the possibility of finding students talking about topics that had nothing to do with the present, previous or next task. Here we found students talking mainly about personal topics such as the weekend, football, the Military Service, or being a volunteer in the Olympic Games, among others. Usually these topics had started before the preparatory or wrap-up segments and they were just finished there. This is the case of excerpt 122 where students started talking about the Olympic Games (see right column) when the teacher was collecting compositions. Note that L4 and L3 were conversing when the teacher signalled the beginning of the preparatory segment (see underlining) and continued doing so until right before the very start of the performance stage (see bold type).

## • excerpt 122

- T Right. OK. Close books.  
 L4 Mark, the composition.  
 T The compositions? ((Takes his composition))  
 (.11)
- T-C Right. OK? Let's-.  
 (.02)
- T Take a piece of paper. I'm going to read ehñ give a dictation . . . i I should remember this is not my book). ((Self talk)).  
 (.19)
- T Right. OK ((.10) Right? . . . I'm going to read it once.  
 (.03)  
 (.08)
- L4 Ets voluntari olímpic? Jo estic en el control de doping.  
 L3 No fotis.  
 L4 Com a químic.  
 L3 Jo no sé encara on estaré. No sé ni si estaré. [XXX].  
 L4 [Es el control de hormones i drogues perilloses.  
 L3 Ets voluntari o t'han triat perquè . . . ?  
 L4 No. Jo vaig a treballar.  
 L3 Ah millor.  
 L4 No cobro, però ((Chuckles)) tampoc és que sigui voluntari olímpic.  
 L3 No cobras?  
 L4 Dietes i transport.  
 L3 Ah.
- L4 (Dictation) ((Self talk))
- (Mark 11/5 839)

These three last types of students' side-talk (i.e., anticipating and running behind tasks and being off-task) occurred especially in Mark's class. A factor that seemed to affect the amount of side-talk unrelated to the task at hand was this teacher's style in organizing tasks. Two aspects of his style (his extensive use of the blackboard and his systematic correction stages with allocation of turns) seemed to have favored this behavior in students. Excerpt 123 shows L4 and L5 talking about the composition they were writing/revising (and that they would have to hand in that day) while the teacher was writing on the blackboard (in between the wrap-up segment of a dictation and the preparatory segment of a

grammar task) with nothing for students to do but copy. L4 and L5 continued talking when Mark signalled the official start of the task (see bold type).

• excerpt 123

- |   |   |    |   |
|---|---|----|---|
| T | OK?<br>(The T starts writing on the blackboard for 0.36))                                     | L4 | <u>Aquí es it is obvious.</u>   |
|   |   | L3 | <u>Bien. Hace falta el sujeto.</u>  |
|   |   | L4 | <u>¿Tú crees?</u>   |
|   |   | L3 | <u>Si siempre siempre, es que es que=</u>   |
|   |   | L4 | <u>Mira que lo he puesto a propósito eh?</u>  |
| T | Right. Look at this.<br>(.02)   | L3 | <u>=me he hecho esa misma pregunta yo. Pero si el sujeto viene luego, entonces a sociedad es XX es obvio.</u> |
| T | I want you to write this sentence. . . Say the same thing. Let's try. Tell me what you think. | L4 | <u>Entonces tienes que poner.</u>   |
|   |   | L3 | <u>Es obvio. It is obvious. Es que nunca encontrarás un verbo sin sujeto en inglés.</u>                       |
|   |   | L4 | XXX   |

(Mark, 11/5 1031)

In this case the conversation between L4 and L3 continued over part of the time when the task was supposed to be carried out. However, inattentiveness was not a unique feature of the preparatory and wrap-up segments of Mark's class (though it was very evident there), as the following field note from 4/3 shows:

This class is getting louder and louder and students spend long stretches of time off-task. Students talk a lot to each other, especially the side of the class sitting next to the windows . . . . And of course a high percentage of this talk is in Spanish.

(p. 48)

In Bob's and Sharon's classes there seemed to be less off-task talk. Still, on a few occasions where students in Sharon's class were heard talk about personal issues they were, to my surprise, talking in English (for example, in field note 12/2 p. 55 two students were talking about how difficult a subject from the department was in

English after they had finished the task and were waiting for the teacher to officially conclude it).

In short, sometimes some of these private conversations students engaged in were productive (when clearing up doubts from the previous task and anticipating next ones). But students also used the preparatory and wrap-up segments to engage in less productive activity, from an academic perspective, (when they talked in their L1 about issues having nothing to do with English or the English class).

In sections 5.1. and 5.2. I have described what learners said both privately and in public in reference to the teachers' structuring language-learning tasks, although I am aware that what characterized students' behavior at those times must not have, on many occasions, been unique to them (for example, students certainly provoked laughter and felt anxious at other times during lessons).

In the public plane, it was observed that students tended not to use the preparatory segment to ask questions of the teacher but preferred to ask them later on. They also tended to signal understanding of the task when sometimes there were doubts in students. But often students would end up clearing up doubts, if not by asking the teacher then by turning to students sitting nearby. Turning to a peer to ask for clarification was a usual and a usually effective source of information. Although this private "tutoring" was something spontaneous that none of these teachers planned for in a proactive way.

In the private plane, the analysis of this talk revealed that students could use this side-talk (whether related or unrelated to the task at hand) for academically productive purposes. In any case, the side-talk unrelated to the task at hand showed the students' great capacity to be at two places at a time (listen to the teacher in the preparatory segment—or appear to be listening—and be engaged in another topic).

Finally, Mark's students stood out in this section because they were having their own way. Students were quite active in being at a different place from where the teacher was, a behavior that could have been, in some way, nurtured by Mark's teaching style.

### 5.3. STRUCTURING AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCES

In this section I am going to contrast the teachers' expectations for tasks with students' actual performances. Only the "deviant" ways of performing tasks stemming from clear procedural structuring will be dealt with here. Students performing in some way differently from what the teacher expected because of lack of procedural information were dealt with in 4.2.. Because I counted on a small amount of transcribed talk of students working in groups or on their own, a quantitative comparison between classes has not been possible. The section then consists of the identification and description of deviant ways of performing tasks.

Generally speaking students followed the teacher's instructions quite faithfully. For example in Bob's class during 18/5 task 1, which was a structural conversion task, the teacher told them to go over the difficult sentences only and this was what the pair of students who were recorded did (they did not look at all the sentences but selected them). In 11/3 task 1, Bob's students were asked to form grammar rules after filling in some gaps and they did so. In 26/3 task 1, those same students were asked to give reasons for their decisions and criticize each other's plans in a task where students had to seat people at a table and that's what they did.

However, a few occasions in the three classes could be identified where students' performances in some way or another differed from the teacher's guidelines or expectations. These "deviant" performances could be grouped into three:

- (a) Students' modifications that result into a simplification (the task is made easier or is carried out quickly);

- (b) modifications that change an aspect of the task as it is explained or assumed to be performed by the teacher (an adaptation). These changes, however, do not result in a simplification. They just consist in doing a task in a different way; and
- (c) modifications that consist in doing work that has not been requested by the teacher (overworking).

(a) Simplification

As regards simplification, some students were observed to perform problem-solving tasks in quite peculiar ways, ways that the teacher may have discouraged if he had been there or ways that students would not have followed in the teacher's presence. Some students were observed not to be using the linguistic forms they were supposed to be using at some strategic times. This was evident on 1/4, where the grammar focus was conditionals, as Bob said in excerpt 124:

• excerpt 124

T Remember we are using conditionals here. Yeah. This part of the exercise is a conditional exercise.

(1/4 355)

Students had been given three plans to improve the traffic conditions of a town. They had first of all to decide which plan they would choose or whether to combine them and make a new one. Once agreed on that, they would write the resolution down. So there were two steps involved. Interestingly enough, it was observed that the group of students that was recorded did not use conditionals in the first step, when they were interacting with each other to reach a solution. It was not until they reproduced their ideas into writing, the second step, that it crossed their minds that they should be



using conditionals (excerpt 125, line 3) Still, however, there was some struggle as to whether to actually use conditionals or not. Two students (L3 and L4) proposed not to (lines 8-9) but L17 (the student in charge of writing) included them in her writing (see underlining line 16) and L3 "gave in" (see underlining line 19):

• excerpt 125

- (1) L3 We are going to (.04) develop all the plan A. ((Dictating))  
 L17 ((Writing))  
 L3 Ah no! Pero seguramente lo querrá con (.02) ¿cómo lo querrá? con should. No con . . .
- (5) L4 Sí, con conditional.  
 L3 Con conditional, X.  
 L17 If tal tal tal, I tal tal tal. ¿No?  
 L3 No. Es muy difícil de hacerlo así.  
 L4 No. Va ya está bien eso!
- (10) LL ((Chuckles))  
 . ((.08 inaudible))  
 L17 Develop?  
 (15) L3 Develop, desarrollar. Desarrollar.  
 L17 Ah desarrollar! Would develop, no? (.04) The plan A.  
 ((Writing for .11)) OK?  
 (.04)  
 L3 And (.04) we would take the . . . the bridge of plan B.  
 (20) ((Dictating))  
 L17 ((Writing for .07))

(1/4 212)

What is most interesting is that later the use of conditionals continued to be strategic. When the teacher approached the group and asked one of these three students about the plan they had chosen, L17 read what they had written and the teacher praised the use of the conditional:

• excerpt 126

- T-G Have you got your plan yet?  
 G Yes.  
 T Yeah? Go on imagine I'm another group and explain your plan to me.  
 L3 OK. XX  
 T (((Chuckles)) Come on=  
 LL (((Chuckles))  
 L17 =We would develop.  
 T Good. Sorry.

- L17 We would develop all the plan A and we would take the bridge of the plan B to avoid the traffic delays. We would build a north-west bypass to rejoin the A347 west of the plan. ((Reading))

(1/4 287)

But when groups reported to each other in the next stage of the task (and the teacher was not monitoring the group there), that same student (L17) went back to not using conditionals—in fact, he only used one verb form and it was not the conditional:

• excerpt 127

- L1 You know another solution better than than the plan D plus the plan A?  
 (.02)  
 L17 We have decided about=  
 L1 =Do you have another [solution?  
 L17 [Plan A.  
 L1 Plan A,  
 L17 and part of plan B and a part of C.  
 L1 A part of plan B? With the bridg- with the bridge? Bueno XX  
 L17 Yes.  
 L1 Yeah.  
 L17 With with a north-west bypass.  
 L1 A north-west [bypass. XXX  
 L17 [A bypass (from the) plan ah no no- take the bridge of the plan B to avoid traffic delays. ((Reading))  
And=  
 L1 In the plan A?  
 L17 =In the plan B. In the plan A all the plan.  
 L1 Ah. All the plan A=  
 L17 Yes.  
 L1 =plus the bridge [of the the plan B.  
 L17 [Of the plan B.  
 L3 Exactly.  
 L17 And the bypass of the plan C.

(1/4 375)

Towards the end of the lesson the teacher said to the whole class that students were not doing badly on conditionals. We ignore if more students other than L17 followed this pattern of action but it seems clear that L17's performance would not have pleased the teacher, since in various lessons Bob explicitly said he was

interested in students internalizing grammar ("getting comfortable" 30/4 238) and using it naturally.

A similar case is found in this same class (30/4 tasks 2 and 3), where students were given ambiguous pictures with various interpretations in a multiple choice format (see Appendix G). Students had to choose one answer and give a rationale for the interpretation making use of "must" or "must have." The group of students that was recorded always did the exercise in two phases. In excerpt 128, students were discussing picture 3 questions number one, two and three. Students did choose the answers (lines 1-10 and 22-27) and at times reasoned them out (lines 11-21) but the modal verb was never used. Instead "I think" was at times used to express this lack of certainty (see underlining).

• excerpt 128

- (1) L11 At the hotel.  
 (.23)  
 L10 I think he is at the hotel.  
 L11 No ho sé. XX a començar que era aquesta.
- (5) L10 No.  
 L11 XXX  
 L10 (X picture) ((Self talk))  
 L11 At home, no?  
 L10 At the hotel I think.
- (10) L11 At the hotel?  
 L10 Because [XX=  
 L12 [The hotel I think, no?  
 L11 Why?  
 L10 =Is fire cartel.
- (15) L12 Yes.  
 L10 Instructions.  
 L11 Ah, yes. Yes.  
 L12 And he has the case under the . . . =  
 L11 Mm.
- (20) L12 =the bed.  
 L10 The case under under the bed, aha.  
 L11 Asleep, no?  
 L12 Asleep.  
 L11 Number two, asleep.
- (25) (.03)  
 L12 Is he picking up the phone, putting down the phone?  
 L11 Putting down, no?  
 L12 Down X.

(30) L11 (Perquè està aixecat). Putting down.  
(.09)

(30/4 245)

Excerpt 129 is the continuation of excerpt 128, where students had quickly decided on the answers of the multiple choice. In excerpt 129, L11 proposed going on to another picture (they had not done picture one or two) (line 1). But another student (L12) (lines 4 and 6) reminded them that they should be using "must." The others in the group agreed readily (lines 5, 14 and 16) and they started over with the multiple choice questions from the original picture again but this time they used the modal verb in their answers and talked about whether "must" or "must have" needed to be used and why (lines 18-28 and 32-55).

• excerpt 129

- (1) L11 Picture three only or . . . ? Eh!  
L12 We can do the the number-  
L11 Yes.  
L12 No but we must do that I think with must, have, no?
- (5) L11 Ah! With must have. Yes yes. [OK sí sí sí sí. Yes.  
L12 [X number one, no?  
(.02)  
L12 I think- do you think is present that? (.02) Eh? He [must  
be at a hotel.
- (10) L11 [They  
must-  
L11 They- yeah, number one?  
L12 No no. Picture-  
L11 Ah! OK.
- (15) L12 He said picture three, no?  
L11 Picture three, yes.  
L12 He must be [ . . . at a hotel.  
L11 [He must be at at at hotel. Yes.  
L11 He must been, no?
- (20) L12 No, no, [no.  
L11 [No condition. He must have been?  
L12 No. [Because it's the past.  
L11 [No.  
L11 Ah.
- (25) L12 When it's present is must be.  
L11 OK. Must be.  
L12 Must be.  
L11 Mm.  
L12 And the second is past. When the phone rang do you think  
(30) he was . . . ?  
L10 (Do you think he was) ((Self talk))  
L12 He must have been . . .

- (35) L11 **Et**, asleep. Yeah. He must have been [as asleep.  
 L10 [Sleeping.  
 L11 Yeah. He must have [been as asleep.  
 L10 [Sleeping.  
 L10 No, sleeping.  
 L11 Asleep. No? O sleeping o?  
 (.01)
- (40) L11 And number three he . . . must picking up no he must  
 putting down the phone, no?  
 L12 XXX?  
 L11 Putting down.  
 L12 OK. Putting down.  
 (45) L11 Present?  
 L12 XX now he is picking up. He must be putting down. I think  
 that is in present.  
 L11 He must be?  
 L12 He must be. Yes. [Because the the eh the question is=  
 (50) L11 [Ah, yes yes.  
 L11 =Yes. He must be.

(30/4 266)

This "phasing" in problem-solving tasks occurred again when students were assigned to do picture two, question three in the same handout (see Appendix G). This time students answered the multiple choice questions using the modal verbs in the first phase. It is curious though that they did not make the decision on meaning and form in one same turn. In one turn a student gave the interpretation of the picture without "must" (see underlining). On a following turn that same student or another gave the corresponding form with "must" or "must have," sometimes repeating the content of what the previous student had said sometimes just giving the verb form in isolation (see bold type). This happened three times.

• excerpt 130

- L11 Putting on, no? (.02) Putting on, no?  
 L12 I think yes.  
 L11 **She must putting on . . . her coat (...)**  
 .  
 .  
 L11 This is the waiter. This is the woman and this is his . . . eh  
the man.  
 L12 Do you think-?  
 L11 Yeah.  
 L12 **Must be.**

L11 Yeah, she must be. Yes.

L10 A couple and a waiter.

L12 They must be [a couple and a waiter.

L10 [They must be a couple and a waiter.  
(30/4 535)

It will be observed that in the excerpt above students were not giving reasons for their interpretations, in spite of the teacher having said so to this precise group of students some minutes ago:

• excerpt 131

T Make sure you give reasons. That's what's that's really important there. OK? ((T leaves the group)).

(30/4 386)

As a result, this group of students finished question three very quickly. When they were going to start question two (excerpt 132, lines 1-2) (which they had not been assigned) one student in the group (L10) slowed them down and made them go back to question three (lines 4, 6 and 8), something very similar to what had happened in excerpts 125 and 129. L10 reminded students that Bob had only assigned them to solve one item (question three) and very subtly signalled them that they needed to give reasons (line 14).

• excerpt 132

- (1) L12 Is the man on the right sitting down, getting up to greet them? ((Reading)) What's the meaning of greet?  
(.02)
- L10 No, number three. Number three!
- (5) L12 Only number three!
- L10 Number three and [picture two number three.
- L12 [Ah.
- L10 Only number three.
- L12 [Ah.
- (10) L10 [I think I think is is [. . . putting on the coat. (Sí clar)  
((Self talk))
- L12 [(Excuse me) XXX
- L11 Putting.
- L10 Because=
- (15) L11 =Yes because eh if she must take- she must (.02).
- L10 The the paper who have this man must be the the bill.

- L12 (But) if this paper is the bill eh they must (.02) no [they must be going out.  
 L11 [Ah. No.  
 (20) L11 Going out.  
 L10 [And putting on the coat.  
 L11 [He must be he [must be reading the the bill.  
 L12 [Putting on.  
 L10 No, putting on és posar-te.  
 (25) L12 No, no. Claro claro claro. . . .  
 L11 He must reading the bill and the waiters eh must be . . . .  
 L12 Yes.  
 L11 Yeah?  
 L12 He must be taking out putting on the coat.  
 (30) L11 Putting  
 L12 Yes. I agree.  
 (.04)

(30/4 552)

Only when this group was done with giving reasons, did L10 signal that they could go on to another multiple choice item.

• excerpt 133

- L10 Ja està  
 L12 And the second, do you know what's X greet?

(30/4 564)

Once again we get evidence that students were not using the linguistic items under practice as spontaneously as the teacher would have liked. What is interesting is that this "phrasing", "the rehearsal" that first took place was never displayed to the teacher, who always heard the final draft. In excerpt 126, Bob heard L17 talk about his group's solution to the traffic problems of a town using "would" and in excerpt 132, when interacting with the teacher L11, L10 and L12 would accompany their interpretation of the ambiguous pictures with "must" or "must have" and give a rationale as well.

In Mark's class this separation between content and form was also evident in tasks that required some writing. Students were repeatedly observed to talk about what they would write in the L1 and then turn to write it in English (field notes 30/10 p. 6, 11/11 p. 27 and 29/1 p. 39). However, in contrast to Bob's class, this was

probably done with the consent and awareness of Mark, who on different occasions expressed to me the belief that the students' English at that level was not good enough to use English orally without any previous preparation in writing (field notes, 4/3 p. 51 and 4/11 p. 10).

In a way, what all students described so far were doing was dealing with content and form separately. In excerpts 125 and 129 and in the above mentioned field notes only when students had decided what they were going to say, did they pay attention to how they were going to say it. In excerpt 132, students dealt with content and form simultaneously but they only dealt with part of the content then. In a second step they would deal with the rest of the content again.

A common trait of most of the "deviations" presented so far is that at some point there was a student who readdressed the task and students ended up doing the task in the teacher's way sooner or later—they ended up with the expected product. However, on other occasions the student who did this "monitoring" was not always there. There were two occasions in Sharon's and Bob's lessons each where students simplified the task and there was no rectification or subsequent revision or "rewinding." In 25/3 task 6, Sharon's students were asked to identify the verbs in the passive voice from a newspaper article they had just read and to explain why the passive was being used. The group that was recorded only did the identification of the verbs and never got to deal with why the passive was being used. So students skipped the more difficult and probably the more meaningful step of the task. This omission cannot be attributed to lack of time because students had time left and did something else instead (they commented on the content of



the text and then started reading a second article). The other instance from Sharon is found in 7/4 task 4, a discussion, which consisted of two steps as well: one, choosing one from a number of questions "in order of preference of what interests you most," as Sharon said (465) and two, discussing the answer. What the group being recorded did instead was skip the first step and launch directly into the task by discussing the first question, as a student put it, "we began for the begin" (483). Here students did without a step that involved some sort of "planning."

In Bob's class students were also observed to do without the communication gap built into some tasks. In my field notes on 28/10 I recorded a comment on a task where groups of students were given envelopes to play a game. The teacher told them to open their envelopes, take one piece of paper each and read it to the rest of the group in turn while the others would listen. I wrote: "The group I am watching decide to put the paper in a place where the four members of the group can see it. One student even gets up so that he can read" (p. 14). Again the product is what the teacher expected (i.e., the texts got read) but not the process (i.e., instead of listening to each other they read directly from the text).

#### (b) Adaptations

I will now turn to the second type of modification, the adaptation. Here we find times when individual students adapt a task and times when students publicly cause the teacher to announce an official adaptation. We find two instances, one in Sharon's and one in Mark's class of the first type of adaptation where the students without the teachers' permission a priori decided to do the task differently. In one task (7/4 task 3), a pair of

students did two adaptations of the task as it had been assigned by Sharon. The teacher had told them to talk about their best friend but these two students ended up writing about their oldest friend. The topic shift was negotiated overtly between the two students:

• excerpt 134

- L6 I don't have a: a best friend.  
 L7 Yes. (.06) I have few fewest friends. My oldest friend.  
 L6 Yes.  
 L7 I want to talk about my oldest friend.  
 L6 ((Chuckles))

(7/4 411)

But the decision to write and not talk was dealt with covertly. L6 asked L7 whether they were supposed to do the task orally or in writing. But that must have been an invitation to write, since by the time that question got asked it was clear that it was an oral task—everybody else in class was speaking. L7 seemed to have interpreted the question as a suggestion, since he readily accepted to do the task in writing. There is a similar instance from Mark's where the teacher explicitly told students to write notes as they were preparing a role-play and a pair of students were observed not to do the writing but to go directly on to the speaking part.

Neither Sharon nor Mark, however, ever opposed the adaptations described above, although I, of course, did not know to which extent teachers were aware of them. In the task about "best friends" (see excerpt 135) Sharon was actually told about the change of topic and she showed approval:

• excerpt 135

- T Have you a a best friend, L6?  
 L6 ((Shakes his head))  
 T No? ((Laughs)). I don't believe you. You are talkative and friendly and social not to have a good friend.  
 L6 Yeah, eh this is the reason.  
 L7 ((Chuckles))  
 L6 I has a lot of friends but one . . . =  
 T =One special friend=

- L6 =no.  
 T Not even, I mean, not even when you were at school. Sort of like, I don't know, going [X].  
 L6 [Yeah, yeah.  
 L7 I am in the same- I stay in the same situation.  
 T [Oh, was in was in.  
 L7 [But I am going to talk about my oldest friend.  
 T-L7 Ah! OK. Talk about that, yeah, your oldest friend, aha.

(7/4 425)

Modifications of a much more subtle type were also observed. These were idiosyncratic ways of carrying out tasks that did not exactly follow the teacher's procedural structuring. On 29/1 I was observing how a pair of students were matching a number of sentences in different verb forms with their corresponding labels (i.e., simple present, present progressive, present perfect etc.). Instead of using the labels to narrow down the number of possibilities as Sharon told them to do, the students identified verb forms without looking at the list of labels (field note, 12/2 p. 43).

I will now move on to look at the times when one or more students intended to achieve an official modification for the task. What is most curious about these incidents is that students made such requests in a covert manner. In the three cases identified in the data students always made this request disguised under a clarification question, as if something about the instructions of the task was unclear:

• excerpt 136

- (1) L9-T ((Asks if they have to choose one adjective from the book))  
 T-L9 No, choose an adjective from the book.  
 L-F From the book.  
 T-C Yes. Choose, I mean, choose an adjective from this list, sorry.  
 (5) [XX  
 C [Ah. C::h.  
 T-C OK. Choose another adjective.  
 T-G If you want to choose another adjective, XXX.

(Mark, 1/4 691)

In the excerpt above it was only when the teacher repeated one aspect of the instructions (lines 2 and 4) that the students showed lack of enthusiasm (line 6). And these students' reaction caused the teacher to give in and announce the modification (lines 7 and 8). In excerpt 137, the same pattern is followed (students' clarification request [line 3], the teacher's response [lines 4 and 7], followed a student's or students' display of lack of enthusiasm [lines 5-6 and 8]). But this time Mark did not fall into the "trap." Previous to the conversation reported in excerpt 137, the teacher had just been telling students they would have to fill in a plan of a house by drawing while they would hear a cassette. One student (L3) seemed to try to get Mark's approval to write and not draw the information on the plan (see underlining):

• excerpt 137

- (1) T Do you understand?  
 LL Yes.  
 L3 But write [the information or?=  
 T [Yes. You're going to-, you for example [you [hear,=  
 (5) L3 [=or draw it?  
 L [draw?  
 T =there is a room on the left, so you put a room. (((Draws a room on bb)).  
 L3 [Oh no!  
 (10) T It is two by three meters, two by three ((Draws)). There ar- is a window in the west wall, window ((Draws)). You understand?  
 LL Yes.

(23/3 702)

In field note 30/10 (p. 10), Sharon responded to a student's covert intent to get approval to perform a task differently by being elusive. This occurred in a context where the teacher had just presented students the class library and had told them: "Don't underline words in the book." Towards the end of the class a student approached the teacher and asked if she could write in the book. The teacher responded that the class would have to take a vote on that. As far as I know, this vote was never taken.

(c) Overworking

The third and last type of modification has been labeled overworking. Overworking was a behavior only noticed in Mark's class and it consisted in the habit of copying and writing full sentences on occasions where the teacher did not ask them to do so and on occasions where it seemed not to be necessary. For example, some students were observed to write full sentences in a task where the teacher had modelled only writing the verb forms (field note, 11/11 p. 21). In the field note from 22/1 (p. 31), students were asked to underline a number of verb forms directly on the textbook and three students were observed doing the task in their notebooks, thus taking a longer procedure than that suggested by the teacher. Finally students in this class were also seen copying down the instructions that Mark wrote down to perform a task. In 1/4 task 2 three out of six students I was observing more closely wrote the set of instructions from the blackboard while the teacher was writing them, something that, to my mind, did not make any sense to copy.

Even though the illustrations of overworking were instances of students' behaviors not ordered by the teacher, Mark seemed to indirectly have encouraged that behavior since he tended to "overwork" himself and had sometimes asked students to "overwork" as well. Also, his peculiar use of the blackboard could have contributed to the students' overworking. He was observed to, for example, write the answers of a task on the blackboard, something that at that time I found time-consuming and unnecessary (field note, 11/11 p. 21). He always left considerable time for students to copy from the blackboard no matter what it

was (grammar rules, examples of grammatical structures, a language exercise). Often some of what he wrote and expected students to copy (especially language exercises) was not strictly necessary to keep a copy of, to my mind. In addition to being used to copying from the blackboard, these students were also used to having Mark use the blackboard frequently and sometimes for relatively long stretches of time<sup>4</sup> in comparison with the other two teachers (i.e., to explain grammar, to write phonetic transcriptions, to give procedural information, to write exercises for students to do on the spot). In his frequent uses of the blackboard he had the habit of turning his back to the students and not announcing what it was that he would be writing. This habit probably caused students to automatically write everything the teacher wrote without taking the effort of discriminating what was worth taking note of from what was not. Another cause could be that some of these students' initiatives to copy indiscriminately could come out of an eagerness to keep engaged, to do something at these times where the teacher left students with nothing to do<sup>5</sup>.

In summary, this analysis identified three types of students' modifications of tasks: simplification, adaptation and overworking. In simplification, students showed awareness of what to say in the first minutes of the performance stage and then they showed awareness of how to say it or vice versa, but not at the same time.

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<sup>4</sup> In 4/12 415 Mark spent five minutes and forty-seven seconds writing an exercise on the blackboard without telling students what it was about. In 4/5 078 he took a total of three minutes thirty-eight seconds to write a grammar explanation. Numerous other examples are to be found in the data.

<sup>5</sup> Some students used these periods of apparent lack of activity to socialize and have fun as well.

However, this sectioning of form and meaning was not traceable in the final product that the teacher saw. In adaptation, students were observed to, on their own initiative, slightly change an aspect of a task from how the teacher had explained it during procedural structuring. Or to seek the teacher's permission for a change masked under a clarification request. The third type of modification, overworking, was characteristic of students in Mark's class and seemed to bear some resemblance to some of Mark's behaviors in class where he also overworked.





## **CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

In this final chapter, based on my previous descriptions and analyses, I first summarize this study and draw connections between the different sections in chapters 4 and 5 as well as with previous studies reviewed in chapter 1 (6.1. and 6.2.). Sometimes I offer further interpretations of selected phenomena that were not mentioned in the previous two chapters because they are rather exploratory, being backed up with less evidence than the interpretations made in chapters 4 and 5. I then make a general summary (6.3.), look for implications for further research (6.4.) and consider the potential of this study to teacher development (6.5.). I finally conclude with some methodological reflections (6.6.).

### **6.1. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

In chapter one, it was mentioned that in the context of primary education different styles in procedural structuring had been identified. The present study also found out differences between teachers in the context of foreign language teaching to adults. In addition, the present study could also detect differences in providing other types of structuring, that is, in linguistic, topic and psychological structuring. Sometimes these differences were evident through frequency counts, while at others they were only evident after a qualitative analysis of the classroom interaction.

What follows is an individual description of how each teacher structured language-learning tasks. These three descriptions have been written by compiling the findings on the three teachers' from each of the sections in chapters 4 and 5 and they have the purpose of summarizing all the information given so far as well as for the reader to get a more holistic idea of each teacher's structuring style. Even though in describing the structuring style from each class I focus on the teacher (rather than the class), there is the understanding that each teacher's style is the product of his interaction with that particular group of students. Those same teachers in different classes might have provided structuring somewhat differently.

### **6.1.1. Bob**

As regards procedural structuring, Bob's was a class where students usually knew what to do and what they were practicing, even at times when he was not too explicit during the preparatory segment. This was so:

- because of this teacher's use of reviews and previews, where he announced the agenda for the present class and drew connections with previous and future work, and
- because he also provided some indirect procedural structuring through his interactions with groups while performing tasks.

Bob was a strong provider of not only procedural but also other types of structuring. The fact that he implemented usually one or a maximum of two tasks per lesson resulted in each task containing more structuring events at the beginning and end of tasks/lessons than in any of the other two teachers' lessons/tasks. At the start of lessons, Mark and Sharon waited for latecomers to arrive by returning homework and implementing short tasks (e.g., games) respectively. Similarly, towards the end of lessons when there was some spare time, Mark and Sharon either lengthened the performances of tasks or implemented short new ones (i.e. word games). In contrast, in Bob's class the first major task started also when everybody had arrived but he used to spend these first minutes of class time with a lengthened preparatory segment (especially with reviews across lessons, psychological structuring and specific directions). Similarly, when there was some time left towards the end of the lesson and the major planned task was apparently completed, he lengthened the wrap-up segment especially with linguistic structuring (telling students how they were doing with grammar, giving them some feedback, providing a synthesis of the grammar they had practiced that day etc). In short, having fewer tasks per lesson allowed Bob to provide more structure in setting up tasks and bringing them to an end.

According to Bob, the organization of lessons around one or two tasks where students spent most of the time in groups was product of an adaptation of his teaching style to this particular group of students who, he sensed, felt uncomfortable in a teacher-led arrangement (which was how he started teaching this class at the beginning of the year). This strong emphasis given by Bob to the working in small groups in this class was probably an added factor in determining the strong amount of structuring mentioned in the preceding paragraph<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, these long periods of group work also permitted this teacher to have long and exploratory interactions with groups of students where Bob complemented the procedural structuring, supplied further linguistic structuring and used several strategies to motivate students indirectly.

Bob's reported view of these students as being weakly motivated could also have influenced his pressuring style during psychological structuring, where he tried to motivate students by building up "fear" in them, warning them of where they could go wrong, stressing the difficulty of the task about to be started etc.

Sometimes Bob's wording of his talk during structuring was sophisticated. It, at times, seemed he was addressing another teacher instead of his students. This choice of words could be an indirect strategy to motivate students through a pressuring style, giving the impression that learning English was difficult. Lemke (1990), however, in talking about science teachers using scientific language has said that a style that reinforces the idea that science is

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<sup>1</sup> I make the assumption that students need more guidance at the start of tasks when they work independently of the teacher (and thus more structuring) than when the whole class works together with the teacher.

difficult and authoritative could have an alienating effect instead of a motivational one. We ignore what the effect was in Bob's students.

In short, Bob provided clear procedural structuring and a strong structure at the preparatory and wrap-up segments through specific directions, linguistic and psychological structuring as well as through reviews and previews. He also complemented this structuring at the beginnings and ends of tasks with further structure given to students during group work, where he interacted intensely with students and expected students to do the same with each other. Finally, he characterized himself for motivating students differently at the beginning of tasks than at other places in the lesson. In the preparatory segment, he used to present tasks as difficult and even "dangerous", however, as the task progressed he did not stress those features any more and took a more encouraging style towards students.

### **6.1.2. Mark**

From day one, Mark showed that he had a low opinion of himself as a teacher. After my first observation to his class in October, he asked me what other teachers I was observing. When he knew they were Bob and Sharon, he responded that he considered them as model teachers and that he usually recommended students to take those teachers (field note, 30/10 p. 7). In that statement, Mark seemed to be implying that he was not as good a teacher as them.

As the year progressed, Mark showed some apprehension or lack of predisposition towards the data collection I was pursuing on several occasions. Neither of the other two teachers showed this attitude. In December when I proposed an interview with him, the slight predisposition on his part took me to postpone it and ask him again in May, when he acceded to the meeting (we knew each other better). In March, there was still some trace of his teaching not being interesting enough for the research. On the first day he was going to be audio-recorded, he said "I don't think I'll say anything interesting" and after the lesson he insisted that he was worried that class would not be worth my while (field note, 11/3 p. 47).

In addition, Mark was not very enthusiastic about the profession and viewed the field of ESL with certain criticism ("a pseudo-science," interview p. 4). In short, there seemed to be a certain self-awareness that he was not as good a teacher as Sharon and Bob as well as a feeling of distance with the profession (he said he preferred a history class he was teaching at the time). The analysis of the structuring he provided in his class at the School of Physics corroborated his self-perception as a weaker teacher in several sections in chapters 4 and 5.

Mark's major weaknesses centered on (a) overusing the blackboard, (b) leaving students uninformed for relevant periods of time, (c) being rarely interactive and (d) permitting long disruptions, mainly during the preparatory segment but also in the wrap-up segment.

Mark used to spend long periods of time in the preparatory and wrap-up segments of tasks writing on the blackboard. He would write instructions, he would write full grammar explanations,

he would write language exercises from beginning to end. He seemed to have a preference for this medium over oral explanations and over the distribution of handouts, which would have been less time-consuming at times. These periods of time had two other features which did not make these "blackboard periods" very engaging for students. Mark used to start using the blackboard without announcing what he was about to write. And while he was writing on the blackboard, he did not elicit any information from the students. If he accompanied his writing with some talk, this did not require students to participate verbally. His talk was secondary to the information on the blackboard.

This non-interactive style was most evident during linguistic structuring (as well as in his treatment of grammar in other parts of the lesson). Behind this overreliance on the blackboard to explain grammar, there seemed to lie a constant avoidance to deal with students' grammar problems in an individualized way. He would usually organize lessons so that he was able to give public grammar explanations without having to attune them to the specific problems students encountered. That seemed to be why this teacher did not allow students to ask questions during the correction stages of tasks and tended to postpone grammar explanations to the wrap-up segment where they could be more general since he had the chance of initiating them.

These actions in Mark (use of the blackboard, lack of information to students and little interaction) seemed to foster in students behaviors that were not obvious to me in Bob's and Sharon's classes. On one occasion, students in side-talk complained about Mark's way of giving directions. On other occasions, when students were left with nothing to do but copy, some students

easily turned to socializing and joking. During those same periods, some students had an opposite reaction. They were curiously seen to adopt the teacher's style and copy everything out from the blackboard indiscriminately. At other times, the lack of teacher-student interaction during linguistic structuring resulted in explanations a few students did not fully follow. His unidirectional and generic talk favored the giving of grammar explanations that were not attuned to some students' specific linguistic problems.

Cicourel (1986) reported having observed some of Mark's behaviors in inexperienced teachers and attributed them to shyness on their part not to adopt the teacher role. This explanation does not seem applicable to Mark, who was not a beginning teacher. I would rather hypothetically attribute it to three other factors: (a) inability to put himself in the students' place, (b) an uneasiness with grammar and (c) a narrow view of how languages are learned.

The long periods of time where students were left inactive could stem from a lack of this teacher's capacity to put himself in the role of a learner and imagine what it would be like to be a student in his class on those occasions.

Mark's handling of linguistic structuring could be attributed to an uneasiness with grammar, which would hypothetically have taken him to find in this unidirectional style a safe way to teach (not asking students, avoiding specific questions and sometimes turning his back to students to write on the blackboard).

Another hypothesis to explain this characteristic handling of linguistic structuring may lie in a rigid lock-stepped view of how grammar is learned. Behind this style in dealing with grammar, there could be the assumption that the language teacher could



mainly help students learn the language by having them copy general rules and having them study those rules later on at home. This rather simple approach to learning was most evident outside the structuring segments in the way Mark used to give feedback to correct pronunciation. He would write the phonetic transcription of the mispronounced word without asking the student to pronounce the word again and often without pronouncing it himself. Learning seemed to simply be equated with copying and studying.

Probably out of this assumption that practicing or interaction was not a valuable commodity in the language classroom (the valuable commodity was studying), there was no fostering on the part of Mark to use English or to cooperate in groups. The insistence that Bob and Sharon showed in these two aspects is comparable to the insistence he showed in getting students used to bringing dictionaries to class (again reflecting a more "analytic" attitude). In my field notes I wrote:

Mark comments to me during class time that this is quite a good class. As a proof he mentions the fact that most students bring dictionaries to class. Later on in class he insists on the students who haven't got dictionaries to bring them.

(11/11 p. 18)

Mark's students spent great amounts of time during group work looking for the right translations in dictionaries, asking for translations to other students and to the teacher, asking me, and interacting with each other in their L1. Meanwhile, the students in Bob's and Sharon's classes spent class time mostly communicating with each other in the L2.

Mark seemed to have as little interest in making his linguistic structuring interactive as in making group work fully productive. Nevertheless, he seemed to be a bit concerned about the little use of

the L2 in that class in comparison with other ESL classes. On several occasions, Mark raised this issue in our informal conversations and justified why he allowed the L1 in his classes. He argued that he did not demand the use of the L2 on the basis of not taking unnecessary time and on the basis of students at level three not having enough English yet. However, these arguments do not appear to be solid enough. The argument of time does not fit in with this teacher's extensive use of the blackboard, when time did not seem to be an issue. As regards the students' inability to use English at that level, his thinking seems to contradict the evidence from Bob's and Sharon's classes where students did use the L2 with more frequency. Besides, on a questionnaire where the students in the three classes were asked whether they thought they had the ability to use English to communicate with each other in class, the students in the three classes (including Mark's students) responded unanimously in the affirmative (Tragant, 1993).

Another recurrent "problematic" theme in my observations were the behavioral problems in this class, which were made evident during structuring when a stimulus for laughter would result in a long disruption and a fragmentation of the flow of the lesson. Some students' behavior during class time makes me think that part of Mark's poorer structuring must have been greatly influenced by managerial problems.

I will now turn to briefly mention other "non-problematic" features that characterized Mark's structuring. Because of the higher number of tasks per lesson than in Bob's class, Mark did considerably less structuring per task and some of this structuring

(the specific directions and the psychological structuring) seemed to depend on the nature of the task. He made little use of these two types of structuring in tasks that were not related to the final exam or were not homework assignments. Neither were previews or reviews usual in his lessons, although the higher number of tasks per lesson could have justified reviews and previews within lessons. The most frequent structuring was the linguistic type, mostly question time and expansions in the wrap-up segments.

To recapitulate, the most outstanding feature in Mark's structuring was that it seemed to contribute to making his lessons less demanding than Bob's and Sharon's. Students were allowed to talk in the L1, they spent significant periods of time engaged in activities requiring low level skills (i.e., copying), and when the teacher explained grammar they were not required to participate. In some way, students' abilities were probably being underrated.

### 6.1.3. Sharon

Sharon saw the learning of a language as a frustrating experience, as she explained during the interview:

Sharon: It's the idea that in your head you've got an adult mature brain with developed opinions and what comes out from your mouth is "I like," "I don't like," "I agree," "I don't agree." None of the nuances, none of the depths that differentiate you from a four year-old and a twenty year-old can be expressed. I mean, you are still on that very "I'm thirsty, hungry."

Me: Infantile.

Sharon: Very infantile. And that fear that frustration of not being able to express yourself, I think, I mean more than express yourself, having to almost make yourself ridiculous, almost a loss of ego . . . (emphases added)

(interview, p. 22)

One would have thought that with that sensibility towards language learning, Sharon would give students strong psychological structuring. She did not. This was because she used three other means to motivate students and build up a non-threatening atmosphere in her lessons.

In the preparatory and wrap-up segments, Sharon intended mainly: (a) to be engaging, (b) to make students feel at home, and (c) to present the learning of English as accessible.

(a) Sharon intended to engage students, to get their attention through her frequent use of humor and topic structuring as well as through making linguistic structuring participative (that is interweaving questions in her grammar explanations). The use of humor could have the effect of releasing the frustration involved in learning a language, as Foster (1990) put it from a Freudian perspective: "La tension provoquée par la frustration [de l'adulte-débutant en langue étrangère] peut être libérée physiquement par le rire et ainsi l'énergie auparavant bloquée par l'inhibition peut s'extérioriser par le rire et atténuer la tendance à l'agressivité" (p. 91).

The game-like start of some tasks where students had to guess where the teacher wanted to go (instead of having the teacher explicitly announce the procedure) could also be seeking the students' attention.

(b) Sharon also tried to create a good atmosphere in class so that students would feel at home. She did that in the manner she interacted with students. For example, when students came in late she would stop the class to greet latecomers heartily ("Hi. Come on in" or "Hello sweetheart"), no matter how late they were. Or when during structuring, students did not respond to her elicitation

requests, she put the blame on herself ("I'm not communicating, am I?") not on the students. Similarly, when students were being noisy, instead of blaming them, she asked them to collaborate with her ("Keep it in English, L12. Be nice to me. You can see I'm having a horrible day today").

(c) Sharon also presented the learning of English as something accessible and logical. And that was reflected in her use of very plain and simplified language (in contrast with Bob) when giving specific directions and descriptions.

Sharon's way of dealing with frustration has been the topic of the description of hers so far. I will now turn to other aspects of her teaching related to structuring.

Sharon provided few previews and reviews as well as few events in linguistic structuring. In contrast, she used to provide frequent topic structuring. The number and nature of tasks as well as how these were implemented explain these features.

To start with, Sharon was the teacher with a higher number of tasks per lesson, twenty-five in almost six hours (as many tasks as Mark, whose lessons were recorded twice as much time). So many tasks could be fitted into fifty-minute periods of class time at the expense of reviews or previews and more structuring in general. Beginning tasks usually implicitly signalled what the theme of the lesson was going to be, that first task having the substitute function of a preview. And when there were five minutes left, the teacher introduced a quick task until the end of the class, a time Bob would use for linguistic structuring, reviews or previews.

Secondly, the fact that the majority of her tasks were skill-oriented also explains the scarce amount of linguistic structuring in Sharon's lessons.

Finally, the higher amount of topic structuring comes from the fact that there were many lessons with no reporting or correction stages (another reason why there could be so many tasks per lesson). Topic structuring was a device to conclude a task quickly and be able to jump on to the next one.

Sharon sometimes did not make the language focus of the lesson clear to all students. As a result, there were occasions when some students took certain tasks as places to just develop fluency with no conscious awareness of form. Students' learning objectives did not coincide with the teacher's, although she seemed to be unaware of the mismatch. Wrong assumptions of a similar type occurred with the theme of the lesson. Sharon usually organized the lesson around a topic but did not announce it explicitly. As a result, some students did not prove to have made these expected thematic connections.

In short, Sharon's structuring was entertaining, humorous, participative, non-threatening, topic-oriented and quick-paced. The concern with starting quickly probably led her to sometimes make assumptions about the learning objectives and the thematic thread of lessons that students sometimes did not grasp.

## 6.2. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The order with which issues will be discussed in this section is approximately the same as the order of presentation of themes in chapters 4 and 5. I start dealing with procedural structuring and the use of specific instructions to then turn to psychological structuring and the use of humor. The next issues are topic and linguistic structuring. The last part with a major focus on the teacher is about the students' lack of chances for decision-making as well as the general lack of information students have about lessons. The final part of the discussion focuses on the learner.

The most generalized problem in telling students what to do, on the few occasions where there was a problem, was that of omitting information, assuming that students would know what the teacher had in mind. In the case of knowing what to do, students found out either by asking the teacher or peers sitting nearby. But that was not always the case with the language focus. Sometimes the whole task was performed without that awareness, an awareness that would not come until the correction stage or until the wrap-up segment was reached and the teacher drew explicit attention to form.

These cases of unclear linguistic focus occurred in tasks that were done with the support of the textbook and the teacher probably assumed the omitted information would be drawn from there, in spite of the fact that the teachers never drew students' attention to the written instructions in textbooks. Maybe this phenomenon could have been avoided with a more regular presence of previews and reviews in the lessons, or if the teacher

had directed students' attention to the textbook instructions with more frequency.

In any case, by looking at the learners' questions on procedure it becomes clear that rather than talking about clear/effective and unclear/ineffective teachers' procedural structuring, it is more precise to talk about students' individual abilities to interpret this. It was rare the case when the lack of understanding was generalized in the class, since there were usually students around who could explain the procedure for a task that one student had missed.

Gagné's teachers (1992) had attributed this lack of understanding to inattentiveness and a willingness to check the procedure with the teacher, behaviors that were also present in my data (excerpts 97 and 113). However, two more attributions need to be added, the individual students' abilities to interpret this information and the poor listening or language skills of some learners (excerpt 111). Not all students seemed to have the same ability to fill in what the teacher left unsaid. And not all students seemed to have the same ability to decode English, even if they had been placed in the same level.

It was also interesting to find out that some questions on procedure, both addressed to the teacher and to students, were not genuine. Sometimes under one such question students wanted to get permission from the teacher to get a turn and enter into the conversation (excerpt 96). At others, students were seeking the teachers' permission to get an official change in the task (excerpts 135 and 136). Still at other times, a question addressed to another student seemed to be an invitation to work in collaboration (excerpt 114). Interestingly, these last type of questions came from Mark's



class, a teacher who did not foster group work. A similar phenomenon was reported by Gumperz (cited in Barr, 1989, p. 57) where lower-class black children claimed they did not know how to do a task at times when they were actually requesting company.

Probably what called my attention most during procedural structuring was the students' abilities and effectiveness in clarifying procedural doubts to each other in the L2. It struck me that these could be great occasions for language development: (a) they were real problems that needed to be solved and (b) students had a model to imitate (the teacher's preceding instructions). In excerpt 111, some aspects of the students' explanations of the task resembled how the teacher had given directions some seconds before. There is evidence from Webb and Farivar (1994, p. 386) of the teacher's influence taking place in students' instructional talk. It seems likely that there might be a similar influence in procedural talk as well.

In spite of the potential for language development that procedural talk seems to have, the three teachers in the study kept the role of structuring language-learning tasks very much to themselves, students playing a role of active interpreters/observers<sup>2</sup> for the main part. Teachers did not usually use the students' capacity for giving directions. Nor did they usually use their capacity for interpreting written instructions that introduced the tasks that teachers were setting up, even though the data showed that some students read them spontaneously.

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<sup>2</sup> When I say that students mainly played a role of observers, I am referring to the fact that they were required to take little verbal participation during preparatory segments. I am not saying that students were being passive though, since these segments required active listening, as Mehan has pointed out (1976, p. 40).

Once, when Mark gave his instructions in writing (thus taking a less active role himself) (excerpt 98), one student showed her understanding of the task in a way that was informative and rich from the point of view of language development. A similarly active way of showing understanding of procedural information in public would not repeat again in the data.

The teacher's "monopoly" in procedural structuring could respond to a willingness not to spend too much time in the preparatory segment and to get started on the task as soon as possible. But, still, it seems to be a pity that students' capacity for structuring was not used in the classroom in a planned manner. In Appendix H, there are some suggestions for teachers to give a more active role to students during procedural structuring. The rationale behind those ideas is that keeping students more overtly active would be beneficial in several respects, in addition to the benefits in language development mentioned before. Students' problems of inattention and non-relevant side-talk evidenced in the data (for example see excerpts 112 and 120) could diminish. In addition, students that were better interpreters of instructions would feel freer to start a task as soon as they were ready and would not have to wait for the teacher to release them.

Turning now to the teachers' use of specific directions, the analysis showed a great homogeneity in how the three teachers dealt with this part of procedural structuring, something that I did not expect. The differences in the positions towards learner training that the three teachers held did not determine major differences, whereas I had expected that the teachers more

involved in this trend would make a more thorough use of specific directions.

Mark was the teacher who proved to be less fond of the dynamics of learner training taking place at the school. He said that some of it was obvious to him and that he was no more interested in this than he was in other aspects of ESL (interview pp. 4-5). When he was asked what were the three things he most valued in learners, he said "come to class, do the homework and study after class" (interview p. 2), which shows his priorities were not very learner-centered.

Sharon and Bob had a stronger interest in learner training than Mark. When Sharon and Bob were asked about what they most valued in students their answers were more in line with the philosophy behind learner training:

Sharon:

- Using appropriate strategies
- Willingness to learn autonomously
- Awareness of why and how students learn English

(questionnaire)

Bob:

- Being cooperative
- Awareness of why and how students learn English
- Holding appropriate beliefs for language learning

(questionnaire)

However, during the interviews Bob proved to be more interested in learner training than Sharon did. He described this area as "a Pandora's box" (interview, pp. 12-13) with more to it than what he first thought. Besides, he was voluntarily involved in the production of material for learner training that the school had set up that year.

Sharon, on the other hand, said that five years ago she had only incorporated into her teaching what she liked about this area

and admitted not being sure what the difference between cooperative learning and learner training was. She was less involved than Bob in this movement taking place at the school, as she said: "The fact that there's a dynamic at the school means that I could take more advantage of learner training than I am doing" (interview p. 23).

In spite of these three different positions towards learner training, the only difference found in the giving of specific instructions was that Sharon and Bob fostered group work and Mark did not. Nevertheless, it must be noted that this attitude to group work seemed to have a strong effect on group interaction. As regards other types of specific instructions, most of the times Bob, Mark and Sharon provided this information in very similar ways. References to specific directions were brief and explanatory (no demonstrations were given). This practice contradicts some theorists who advise teachers to use think-aloud procedures (i.e., demonstrations) (for example, Claxton, 1990) as more encouraging ways of revealing the process.

Several reasons can be hypothesized as to why Sharon's and especially Bob's references to specific directions were no different from Mark's. One possibility would be that Bob's recent incorporation of learner training in his philosophy of teaching had not yet been made evident in his practice. There is evidence from Richardson, Anders, Tidwell and Lloyd (1991) that this happened in reading teachers:

The results of the study suggest that a lack of relationship between beliefs and practices may indicate that the teacher is going through a change process. In the case of Susan, it appeared that changes in beliefs were preceding changes in practices. (p. 579)

Another reason may be that teachers gave these directions not so much out of an interest to make the process obvious but out of an interest to provide the students with the tools for a successful performance (something that would not have to do specifically with learner training). The fact that specific instructions were often accompanied with psychological structuring makes me think that maybe the motivation under both types of structuring must be similar: to prepare students to survive the task. The "survival kit" would include tools to overcome potential problems in the form of directions (specific instructions) and mental preparation (psychological structuring). If "survival" was the objective (not learner training), it then makes more sense to find little difference between the ways Bob, Mark and Sharon dealt with specific directions.

Regarding psychological structuring, it seems clear that through it, teachers intended to prepare students mentally. These psychological events seemed to respond to the teachers' awareness of the students' frustrations as learners, their lack of motivation or their anxiety in learning a language. Some of the excerpts in chapter 4 prove that these feelings were present in some learners. Excerpt 118 was an illustration of individual students panicking in side-talk at the start of a task. And excerpt 31 was an illustration of students publicly responding with lack of enthusiasm to the announcement of a task. Other traits of students' fears were also evident in other parts of the lessons<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Although my purpose was not to collect data about students' feelings towards their learning, there is some evidence of this in the data. For example, in 13/5 L8 said that he had not enjoyed the English class with Sharon because it was not his language and he could not express himself

Previous studies had made the distinction between positive and negative statements in psychological structuring, which I have also been able to maintain in my data analysis. A new contribution is found in the distinction I make between two types of teaching styles, reassuring and pressuring. What is most interesting is that it is not that teachers could be classified into one or the other category. Bob was found to adopt one or the other style depending on whether it was the start of the task or not. This finding was possible because I did not limit myself to looking at the beginning of tasks. There was some relevant psychological structuring going on at other times during the lesson both when Bob addressed the whole class as well as when he addressed groups of students.

Another factor that could have some effect on how students felt in the language class is the use of humor. Unlike the generalized lack of affect reported in a major observation project of elementary and high schools in the U.S. (Goodlad, 1984), there was a sense of humor in the language classes of the three teachers, especially in Sharon's and Mark's. Probably the few number of students per class, together with the fact that English was not a subject in their degrees, as well as the fact that the mode of instruction was not that of the lecture, among others, could have contributed to these displays of affect.

An interesting qualitative difference in the use of humor in the three classes, however, was distinguished in the analysis. Whereas in Bob's and Sharon's classes the laughter was commonly

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well. During the break on 11/11, one student said she was worried about her pronunciation in a talk she would have to give in class the following week (field note from Mark, p. 21). Another, who was going to Holland to study after Christmas, said to me that she was afraid of not making friends because of her poor English (field note from Mark, p. 22).

shared between students and the teacher (excerpts 88, 100, 105), in Mark's class the laughter was usually either at the expense of a student or the teacher (excerpts 99 and 102). It was not shared but "competitive." The nature of laughter in Mark's class caused these incidents to last for longer than when laughter was shared. Probably because of this, Mark was the teacher to initiate laughter less often: The students in his class being the main providers of stimuli for laughter.

As regards topic structuring, I have reached a similar conclusion to the one reached in the examination of specific instructions. In chapter 1, I reported Lloyd (1993) had found out that most of the events in topic structuring led to low levels of cognitive involvement. I then pointed out that this may have been so because the teachers' motivation under those practices could be that of involving students (not a truly academic purpose) rather than activating their knowledge (an academic purpose). The use the three teachers in my data made of topic structuring gives support to this interpretation. The teachers' interventions were neither long enough nor did they involve a true exchange of ideas between students and the teacher. This lack of genuine interaction in topic structuring seems to be a pity since it was one of the few places in these lessons where the talk could have dealt with personal issues. Rather, topic structuring seemed to be provided in order to involve students or to get their attention.

In short, topic structuring was a practice to make smooth transitions from task to task and to hold the students' attention in the undertaking. The shallowness with which topic structuring was dealt with seems to parallel the way specific instructions were

communicated. In both cases there seemed to be a common concern with time and getting students to work as soon as possible<sup>4</sup>.

These being language classes, if there was to be a type of structuring where teachers would spend some more time, this was going to be linguistic structuring. One of the unexpected findings from this analysis is that teachers tended not to give linguistic structuring before students engaged in a task. There were comparatively few events in the preparatory segment as well as few stages wholly devoted to the presentation of language properties (four in all). Instead the three teachers tended to either provide formal structuring during the performance, reporting or correction stages as on-the-spot reactions to students' problems or in the wrap-up segments as general reactions to completed work. This postponement in the giving of linguistic structuring could have been the reason why Gagné (1992) found few such events in her data, since she only looked at the preparatory segment.

Having most events in the wrap-up segment could respond to the teachers' willingness for students to rely on their intuitions first and apply rules only when those intuitions fell short. Or it could

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<sup>4</sup> Here are some examples of times during the preparatory segment when Sharon expressed a concern with time:

"I want to go a bit more quickly now" (13/5 399); "We've got problems of time" (13/5 411 and 461); "We've only got ten minutes " 7/4 465.

Here are some examples from Bob:

"Let's go. Tick tock tick tock tick tock. Come on. Let's make this fast, eh?" (26/3 048); "And quickly explain some of the changes you've made" (26/3 269); "Quickly (...) I want you to think about the ones which were difficult" (18/5 015).

Additionally, both Sharon and Bob ended the preparatory segment with utterances that appealed to a quick start of the performance stage: "Let's go"; "Let's move"; "Off you go"; "Go."



also respond to the teachers' eagerness to start the task quickly and not make the preparatory segment last for too long. In any case, this practice probably had the advantage of allowing this structuring in the wrap-up segment to be interactive, since in the wrap-up segment students could draw on the experience of having done the task with other students and sometimes having interacted with the teacher during group work. However, this finding contrasts with the order in which most grammar books present their contents: theory followed by practice (e.g., Grammar in Context, 1983; Grammar and Practice, 1989; Understanding and Using English Grammar, 1981).

My last observation on the teacher focuses on the asymmetry of power between the teacher and students in the three classes and how this was evident during structuring. The planning of tasks and learning objectives was not shared with students in any way. The instances in the data where students made a personal adaptation to a task (excerpt 134) or covertly sought the teacher's permission to make an adaptation (excerpts 136 and 137) are probably a product of not having formally consulted with students in the making up of plans for classroom activity.

Additionally, teachers informed students about that planning only scantily. Mark and Sharon gave few previews within lessons. Consequently, their students uncovered the contents of a lesson as this progressed. Bob kept students a little more informed in that he gave previews within lessons and also drew connections with the preceding and following lessons. But none of the three teachers informed students of medium term objectives (e.g., a week, a month). At the beginning of the year all students in the school had

been given the syllabus of the course (a year-long "preview," so to say), but then none of the teachers updated that initial plan for students on a regular basis as the year progressed. There seemed to be a gap between that year-long syllabus and the very short-term planning that students received from their teachers.

Teachers might have had their own motivations for not informing students of connections between different parts of a lesson and across lessons:

- Maybe teachers took it for granted that students would see the continuity from task to task and lesson to lesson without being told.
- It could be that teachers actually thought that students would not benefit from knowing in advance what they would be doing, that it was a teacher's job.
- It is possible that teachers at times did their planning on a day-to-day basis, a practice that would have impeded any anticipatory announcements.
- It could be that teachers may not have given reviews and previews to keep an element of surprise in lessons.

The above are just hypotheses. There is not enough evidence in the data to claim which of these hypotheses (or if it was a different one) is true for the teachers in the data.

Although the analysis of the learner was limited due to difficulties in the recording and transcription of the data, it was worthwhile, especially when one considers that learners had not been listened to as closely by other authors examining structuring.

As far as the public talk is concerned, students showed to be sensitive to the teachers' apparent rush to get started and they seemed to cooperate with the brevity of the preparatory segments. This cooperation consisted of keeping questions to the teacher to a minimum during that segment and in asking them to peers or to the teacher after the preparatory segment.

Turning now to side-talk, most of what was captured during the preparatory and wrap-up segments is especially valuable, since in most cases it is a type of interaction teachers usually have no access to and, to my knowledge, research has not paid much attention to yet. Side-talk during the preparatory and wrap-up segments (including the transitions from these segments to the stages) seemed to have many functions. Side-talk was an outlet for fears and anxiety. It was also a place to socialize and joke around. Upon request, some students clarified directions to peers, too. It was also a time to finish a task students had not completed when the teacher brought it to a close. And probably most importantly, students used this time to further direct their attention to some formal property of the language.

In any case, through this talk one could know whether students were attending the teacher only or were engaged in something else. There is evidence in the data that sometimes students used these transitions to be somewhere else (running behind or anticipating a task, or socializing). This is not surprising if we look at the low rates of attention reported by ESL students in Cohen and Hosenfeld (cited in Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p. 170).

The side-talk that was unrelated to the public talk does not have to be negative in itself. It just shows that sometimes students needed more time for one task before going on to the next and that

was why they lag behind. It may also show that some students may not have needed to listen to the teacher's instructions to know what to do or that some of them systematically relied on neighboring students for instructions.

The side-talk in the data that was less educationally productive had nothing to do with the English class (socializing). Nevertheless, that talk should and could not be totally suppressed since it is part of human activity (deVoss, 1982). Socializing seemed to be what made the English class attractive for some learners, as L14 said:

• excerpt 138

- T Have you enjoyed English? And Why? Give me a reason, not just yes, L14.
- LL ((Chuckles))
- T ((Chuckles)) Why . . . What have you enjoyed?
- L14 (.05) Because there are a lot of people.=
- LL =((Laughter))
- T Important, important. Tell me, tell me. Important. A lot of people, you make friends.=
- L14 =Yes. You can talk about something of the faculty.
- T Aha.

(Sharon, 13/5 063)

Still, however, this socializing talk is revealing. When students were heard to be off-task, they were usually talking about personal matters. Looking at the tasks the teachers implemented, it will be observed that especially Bob and Mark rarely included personal topics in the contents of their tasks. The contents of tasks were usually removed from students' lives. Maybe if this aspect had been taken into account in the planning of lessons, students would have had less of a need to go off-task in between tasks.

Unlike the talk to socialize, there was evidence in the data of side-talk that could have a lot of relevance academically speaking.

Sometimes students noticed aspects of the language that the teacher had not directed attention to (see excerpt 123). These topicalizations in side-talk (items that become the topic of conversation) could have a rich potential for language learning, especially after a close rereading of Slimani's studies<sup>5</sup> (1989, 1992). In her findings, she claimed that student initiated topics were stronger determiners of learner-reported uptake (what learners claim to have learned from a particular lesson) than teacher-initiated topicalizations. If this was so in public talk, the student-initiated topicalizations during side-talk that were recorded in my data would also seem to qualify as potential determiners of learning outcomes. There is some support for this hypothesis. These unofficial topicalizations could explain a phenomenon that Slimani could find no answer to in her data. She found that 11% of her students' reported uptake had not been topicalized or even mentioned during public classroom interaction and she concluded:

Uptaken events . . . are revealed to be highly idiosyncratic. The detailed analysis of the interactive processes has shown that different features of the same event have been uptaken by different learners. . . . Moreover, while many of the claims could be traced in the transcripts as having received some kind of emphasis on the part of the participants, mostly of the teacher, others merely occurred as part of the classroom interaction or did not feature at all in the text, suggesting that learners reacted with some autonomy to what went on during the interactive event. (emphasis added) (1992, p. 214)

It seems likely that the uptake that Slimani could not trace back to the classroom discourse could be traceable in the students' side-talk, a type of data that Slimani did not collect.

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<sup>5</sup> These studies involved thirteen Algerian male university students in an EFL class.

I will now move on to the next and last topic in this section, the examination of students' performances in view of the teachers' instructions or expectations. The fact that in these classes many tasks were done in groups could give away clues as to how a task got performed in its natural context through the examination of the interaction in the groups. If tasks had been done individually, this information would have been impossible to get through just audio recording.

The most revealing observation was that on occasions students seemed to pay attention to form intermittently in tasks that had a combined orientation to skill/content and form. At first sight, this practice seems to contradict the purpose of communicative activities, which in theory integrate meaning and form (Nunan, 1988), especially in those cases when students used the L1 to deal with meaning first. This phenomenon could hypothetically be traced back to causes related to (1) cognitive processes as well as (2) to strategic behavior on the part of the students.

Under the light of psycholinguistics, maybe this dealing with form and content separately is a trait of the stage of these students' learning development and consequently should and could not be avoided. Our transcripts (for example see excerpts 128 and 129) bear certain similarity to those of children acquiring a language, where the child gradually builds up his utterances as Hatch (1976) reports:

Itoh, 1973, Japanese, 2:6 Takahiro  
 Takahiro: this  
           broken  
 H:           Broken.  
 T:           broken

This is broken.  
broken.

Mazeika, 1973, Spanish, 2 1/2 Carlito

Carlito: in the boat

go in the boat

Mommy, him go in the boat

Mommy, go in the boat in a con esa

Mommy, go in the boat

Mommy, go in the boat con esa Daddy ride in the boat.

(pp. 409 and 411)

Students' tendency to deal with content and form at different times could in part be attributed to the students' limited processing capacity to pay conscious attention to form and at the same time process output for meaning.

There is evidence from the literature on reading and writing that this limited processing capacity causes students to fragment content from form. As regards reading, VanPatten (1990), in a study involving 202 English speaking students of Spanish in an American university, found that learners, in particular early-stage learners, had great difficulty in attending to both form and content while reading. Conscious attention to form in the input competed with conscious attention to meaning.

In the literature on process writing, which views writing as a problem-solving activity, writers have been reported to deal with content and form relatively separately as well. In general terms, writers tend to focus on content (through generating and focusing activities) at the outset of the writing process, to gradually turn to form as the drafting proceeds (through reviewing and evaluating activities) (White and Arndt, 1991). The writer's focusing attention from content to form at turns seems to bear some resemblance to some of the excerpts from Bob's, Mark's and Sharon's classes. In a way, what the students did there was a kind of drafting in the first phase of their work in groups (sometimes in the L1 and sometimes

in the L2 and always orally), the second phase being a kind of revised version or final draft (always in the L2 and sometimes in writing).

Another factor that may explain the divorce between content and form may be found in two types of students' strategic behaviors: (a) a tendency to do the minimum work possible and (b) an eagerness to be ready when the teacher would approach during group work.

(a) It is possible that some of the students had a tendency to solve problems or go through tasks quickly, making them as easy and straightforward as possible (recall the student in 1/4 212 who proposed not including an assigned linguistic focus on the basis that: "Es muy difícil hacerlo así"). It somehow gives the impression that some of these students may have seen their work in groups away from the teacher as purely a preparation for the time when the teacher would ask them and not as an objective in itself. That would explain why at times students did not integrate content and form in the absence of the teacher but dealt with these two elements one at a time. They would only integrate content and form in the teacher's presence. A similar phenomenon had been observed in studies involving younger students in general subjects.

(b) A second interpretation of why students simplified tasks during group work could have to do with a concern with time on the part of students. Maybe students sectioned tasks into two (content and form) during group work as a strategy to make sure they would be "ready" in case the teacher approached their group. That is, so that when the teacher would come around student would "have" the answers. Only after this first phase would they be able to go back and restart without a concern for time. In Bob's class (11/3



task 1) a group of students did the grammar exercise first quickly and once finished they went back to the items they had not agreed on:

• excerpt 138

T Which numbers are you speaking about now?  
 L2 ((Laughs))  
 L14 We finish.  
 L2 But- we finished but e:h I don't- coming back? come back?  
 T Yeah, we've come back. Yeah.  
 L2 We've come back to five, six and seven.  
 T Ah. You are thinking about the rule again there.  
 L2 Yeah.

(286)

On 29/1, students in Mark's class were asked to write on an imaginary personal problem that would later on be solved by another group. One group first discussed what problem to write about in the L1. Just when they were getting ready to put those ideas into writing, the teacher came up to the the group and asked them to tell him what they were going to write about. If students had not been over this first quick phase, they would not have been able to have the story ready for the teacher "on time" (field note, 29/1 p. 39).

### 6.3. GENERAL SUMMARY

At first sight, it can give the impression that the topic of structuring language-learning tasks may not be very "juicy" to investigate. Topics of research that are explicitly related to language-instruction may seem more interesting. Nevertheless, the present study has proved that the topic of structuring is relevant, especially in lessons where students spend the bulk of class time working in groups, as was the case in the classes under study. Furthermore, this piece of research was an attempt to integrate some aspects of language instruction and classroom management, two areas that remain quite separate in the literature. The analysis has shown that the line separating these two areas became little clear in the preparatory and wrap-up segments of the lessons observed.

The investigation of the preparatory and wrap-up segments as a unit of analysis could also seem too large a unit, since we are used to research that deals with smaller units like the investigation of questions, feedback, grammar or vocabulary explanations, turn-taking, interaction patterns etc. Taking this larger unit (the "segment") entailed limitations and advantages. Some ground in the depth of the analysis was definitely lost, since structuring includes diverse areas of study (direction-giving, grammar explanations, humor, and psychological issues, among others). Some sections in chapter 1 mostly resented from this heterogeneity. But these limitations were counteracted by the globality that was gained from taking the "segment" as a unit of analysis. The descriptions of how teachers introduced tasks and brought them to a close could give the reader rich information about each teacher's style. At the same

time, the segment was not too large a unit to run the danger of descriptions becoming too general.

In the early stages of data collection, however, the research focus did not include the wrap-up segment. My early focus of study was just the beginning of tasks (the preparatory segment). As the data collection progressed and the lessons were being transcribed, I became more and more interested in how other parts of the lesson outside the preparatory segment related to it. This progressive realization took me to include the wrap-up segment in the analysis as well as other two aspects, the performance of tasks and the students as participants and interpreters in structuring. The flexibility of the approach of investigation allowed me to go beyond the preparatory segment and thus give strength and further globality to the investigation.

The gradual realization that how teachers brought tasks to an end bore similarities to the preparatory segment took me to analyze the two segments together. The analysis showed that wrap-up segments had as important a role as preparatory segments, something that, to my knowledge, had gone unnoticed to other researchers that mainly concentrated on the preparatory segment.

Moving beyond the preparatory segment and looking at what the teacher did and said while students were on-task also allowed me to see alternative ways teachers made use of to provide structure in explicit as well as less direct ways, although future research should probably look more closely into them.

Including the students in the study of structuring was probably the most revealing part of the analysis, especially what concerns the mismatches between what teachers expected students

to do and what they actually did. Nevertheless, the attention given to the learners in this study was not thorough enough. Further research should probably take more of the learners into account.

As regards the contributions of this study in terms of "findings," they can be grouped into four areas: (a) Stable traits in the way teachers provided structuring were described and interpreted; (b) A number of variables that seemed to affect structuring were identified; (c) Teachers were also observed to differ in some respects in how they moved in and out of tasks; And most importantly, (d) the study created categories and labels that can be used as a common language to observe other classrooms and further investigate this topic. What follows is a synthetic elaboration of each of these four points, which will put an end to the section.

Bob, Mark and Sharon sometimes introduced and brought tasks to an end in very similar ways. The three teachers all made use not only of the preparatory but also the wrap-up segment to provide structuring. The three of them also tended to draw attention to grammar after the performance of a task instead of at its introduction. They all gave specific instructions with similar frequency and in a similar way, and they tended to give no information about medium range learning objectives. Even though Bob, Mark and Sharon had different attitudes as regards the students' involvement in the management of their learning, these different positions did not have an observable effect on the above mentioned aspects of structuring.

Probably the most pervading commonality was that the three teachers tended to keep the preparatory segment quite short with

little or swift interaction. The role of some of the information included in this segment (specific directions, topic structuring and psychological structuring) seemed to have a broad common motivation of involving students, not of informing them, and of allowing the task to get going as soon as possible. The brevity of the segment, together with the scarcity of whole tasks devoted to prepare for subsequent ones, show that at times students were plunged into tasks with no previous preparation, a practice that seems to run against what research in the four skills suggests doing.

In spite of the similarities, there were differences too in the way some tasks were introduced and concluded. Tasks with different characteristics tended to be structured differently. A relevant number of traits in tasks were identified as potential determiners of the nature of structuring. Whether a task was skill- or form-oriented, how difficult it was, and whether it was a planned or an improvised task seemed to have an effect on structuring at times. The number of stages per task and the number of tasks per lesson seemed to also be determining factors, as well as whether it was a homework assignment or a classroom task that was being introduced and whether the task had some relationship with the final exam or not.

The teachers also showed stable individual styles in how they provided structuring, irrespective of the nature of the task. Bob stood out for the connections he made with immediately previous and future lessons and for the efficient linguistic structuring he provided. He presented tasks as challenging and pressed on students the idea that groups were places for exploratory talk in the L2.

Sharon stood out for her quick-paced, smooth, contextualized and humorous segments and she also fostered group interaction. On a few occasions, however, she was little clear to students about the linguistic objectives of tasks and she at times left them to induce much of the connections between tasks and lessons.

Mark resembled Sharon in that he rarely provided links between tasks and lessons. But he differentiated himself from both Bob and Sharon substantially in that he showed to be a less effective communicator of procedural and linguistic structuring and he sometimes showed to have a narrower repertoire of devices to provide structuring. In sharp contrast with Bob and Sharon, Mark seemed to underrate students' capabilities, something that permeated in the preparatory and wrap-up segments.

Some of the above mentioned teachers' features in providing structuring could be traced back to their set of beliefs about the field of ESL in general, others to the beliefs about level-three students and still others to the teachers' perceptions of the group of students being taught. Other presage variables, especially aspects of one's personality, probably had an effect in the teachers' styles but that was something this study did not look into.

In reading the above descriptions of the teachers' styles during structuring, it must be kept in mind that the descriptions were a product of the relationship and interaction between each teacher and his students. This means that the structuring that Bob, Mark and Sharon were observed to provide must have been shaped to a certain extent by their students. For example, it is difficult to tell why Mark made so much use of the blackboard during the preparatory and wrap-up segments. It is uncertain whether he did that in most other classes of his or whether it was an adaptation to

a need he perceived in this particular class. It is also difficult to tell whether Mark's more limited repertoire in some of his structuring was a reflex of the "provoking" behavior adopted by some students in that class. In short, the extent to which the descriptions of each teacher in the present study would be replicated with these same teachers teaching a different group of students is unknown, although it makes sense to think that structuring would be sensitive to it.

Finally, an important contribution of the present study lies outside the description and interpretation of the three teachers' classes examined. Lortie (1975), among others, comments on how crucial it is for teachers to have a common language to discuss what they do. Through the development of various categories related to structuring, the present study has generated a core "vocabulary" to facilitate teachers analyzing aspects of their own preparatory and wrap-up segments. Most importantly, the categories can give teachers the chance to use a common language to discuss their teaching with colleagues. This technical vocabulary can also be used by the research community as a flexible framework, a starting point to further investigate this area of structuring in other contexts.

#### 6.4. IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

I see three directions to pursue research on the structuring of language-learning tasks. One line is to replicate the present study under slightly different conditions. The other is to study in depth selected themes or working hypotheses that the study has generated. The third direction consists of posing new problem statements within this general topic of structuring.

In order to study teachers' structuring styles, I would suggest establishing some control over what is taught and probably visit classes on consecutive days, something that I did not do. The teachers under study could be asked to agree to teach the same lessons so that the differences in the ways teachers introduce and conclude tasks are not due to the nature of those tasks. Audio-visual means of recording the lessons could be used not to miss the non-verbal side of communication. Additionally, I would recommend to later on view lessons with the corresponding teachers (and some students maybe) so that their interpretations of specific events during structuring were captured. Teachers' and students' interpretations over structuring could be captured in other ways, too. One of them could be elaborating an open-ended questionnaire or a semi-structured interview that included a selection of excerpts from this study as prompts to be commented on. For example, interpretations could be sought about how students/teachers felt about an introduction to a task with a pressuring style. Or after reading several excerpts of preparatory segments with specific directions, students/teachers could be asked to react to that information. Most interesting would be having them comment on excerpts of student talk (side-talk in between tasks



and talk during the performance of tasks) to see if the interpretations of this talk in the present study coincide with those of teachers and students<sup>6</sup>.

The second line of research on structuring could be that of taking a theme from this study and examining it in more depth. There are several such themes that I consider worth of this follow-up. Three refer specifically to structuring and three do not refer exclusively to it.

As regards linguistic structuring, it would be interesting to see if Bob's, Mark's and Sharon's practices could be replicated by teachers in other contexts.

Another theme for further research deals with teachers' presage variables. The relationship between teachers' beliefs and their perceptions about the group being taught and the structuring they provided in class was pointed out at different times throughout the analysis and discussion of the present work. Examining the interaction between beliefs and practices in structuring seems to be worth giving further attention to.

The third theme with potential is the examination of how teachers' directions are followed by students during the performance in group work. In the past, the bulk of the studies on student talk during group work have been performed under experimental conditions. Evidence from this study makes me think that some of what students were heard to say would not have been said in a setting that was not naturalistic. In my opinion, more work

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, the teachers and students that would be interviewed or asked to fill in questionnaires would not be the same as the participants in this study.

is needed that examines what students do when in groups in a naturalistic setting.

The other three topics for further research have been triggered by the analysis of the data, although they do not refer to structuring exclusively. One deals with side-talk, the other with the interaction between the teacher and groups of students and the third deals with subject-matter knowledge and how it influences teaching practices.

Student talk while the teacher is talking to the class (side-talk) is something that has been looked into in general education. The interest in side-talk lies in that it is a source of data qualitatively different from public talk and the talk gathered from retrospective techniques of data collection. Side-talk is more intimate than public talk (it is not visible to the teacher or the observer) and at the same time it does not run into the dangers of retrospection (Tragant, 1992, pp. 131-136). Because of these qualities, the study of side-talk could be meaningful for those interested in students' interpretations of classroom events from different points of view (language development, pedagogy and psychology).

The second topic for research comes from the realization from the data of the little linguistic structuring during the preparatory segment and how this was compensated for during group work when the teachers would interact with groups. In lessons like Bob's and Sharon's where the teachers spent the bulk of the time not in interaction with the whole class but in interaction with groups of students, it seems sensible to focus research on those latter types of interactions. In the past, classroom-based research has mostly

focused on the teacher's interaction with the whole class, partly because this talk was easier to record and partly because this must have been the major mode of participation in some language classes for some time. But in classrooms where this is no longer so, which I think are many, research needs to concentrate on those group interactions.

One third interest has been triggered by the observation that Mark's way of presenting grammar could be influenced by his lack of security in that subject matter. The interaction between teachers' subject matter knowledge and the teaching of that knowledge is an area that has been researched in general education (for example, see Munby and Russell, 1992) and could also be meaningful to ESL.

The last three proposals pose new research statements within the area of structuring that translate into different research designs:

- Will a teacher who has different perceptions of two classes provide different structuring?
- Does structuring vary as a result of the level taught?
- Is structuring affected by temporal factors?

Bob, Mark and Sharon when talking about their classes spontaneously mentioned their other level three classes that they were also teaching at the time. The three teachers all perceived differences between their classes and claimed adaptations in their teaching as a result of these contrasting perceptions. It would seem interesting to investigate the same teacher teaching two classes which he views differently in order to examine if these different perceptions bring about different ways of structuring.

Another question to investigate would be whether and how structuring changes as a result of the level taught. Here the same teacher could be observed teaching a beginning, an intermediate and an advanced level, for example.

The third question would investigate the existence of changes in the nature of structuring as the academic year progresses: is the structuring provided towards the beginning of the academic year any different from later on? It would make sense to think that structuring at the beginning of the year is more frequent and elaborate than later on. In general education, these differences in time have been researched in the area of classroom management.

To recapitulate, the descriptions and interpretations coming from a study like this which centers on three classes have no guarantee for generalization (nor was this aimed at). Further studies pursuing this same line of research will need to see the replicability of the teaching practices and learning behaviors described and interpreted here. For those future studies I hope the present piece of research awakens specific interests within the area of structuring, provides hypotheses to replicate and gives some orientation as to how to design the study. These have been the objectives in this section.

## **6.5. IMPLICATONS FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

The pressure of every day teaching and the numerous decisions teachers need to take in class make it difficult for some teachers to systematically reflect on their own practices. This piece of research has done what some teachers either do not have time to do (i.e., collect a voluminous amounts of data), or do not have time to do thoroughly (i.e., examine the data in depth) nor the chance (i.e., go into someone else's classroom). By looking at Bob's, Mark's and Sharon's classes, it is expected that teachers will recognize aspects of their own teaching in them (either because of their similarity or contrast).

As one's teaching career progresses, much teaching slips into a routine and aspects of how one teaches may become invisible to oneself. The objective for teachers reading this text should be to make visible some of the invisible patterns in their teaching that they are not aware of as they perform them. The categories that have been developed under the sections in chapters 4 and 5 are "ready-to-use" alternatives to teachers' regular practices for them to try on their own teaching, not because they are better practices but different. For beginning teachers with no teaching experience, the categories and, in general, the whole study can be used as focusing "lenses" in the observation of other teachers. Without the specificity that the "lenses" of categories provide, much reflection may become vague.

In Appendix I, a list of questions has been developed for use in workshops for teacher development. These questions can be utilized to promote the active reading of the different sections of this thesis since they cover all the sections in chapters 4 and 5. The questions can also be used independently of this study to generate

discussion and self-reflection among experienced teachers. Alternatively, the questions can give the beginning teacher a focus in the observation of other teachers.

## 6.6. METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The experience of conducting qualitative research has been positive for many reasons. Going into the field and having the chance to systematically observe other teachers was a privilege that I enjoyed throughout the year. The three teachers' openness to my presence in their classes had much to do with the success of my observations.

Additionally, having the time to spend reflecting on what I had watched and transcribing tapes was a unique experience too, stepping back and reflecting being infrequent activities in most of our contemporary lives. I was sure that there was much to learn both as a researcher and as a teacher from observing and listening again and again to the interactions taking place in the classrooms. Transcribing the lessons was something I enjoyed a lot, even if it was a very slow process. Sometimes I could not stop myself from transcribing classroom events I knew were not relevant for my purposes because of the enjoyment I derived from the activity.

The process of intensive analysis, even if frustrating and anxiety-causing at times, had some good qualities too. I came to know the lessons almost by heart since I shuttled back and forth from the data constantly. This vividness with which I could recreate what I was analyzing probably favored the emergence of patterns and it must have facilitated unconscious thinking after I stopped formally concentrating on a problem (something highly recommended by Krathwohl, 1994).

Towards the end of the study, I realized I felt very close to the analysis that has come up from this process of research. Transcribing and writing up the observations made the experience mine in a way. Revisiting the notes intensified that feeling. Finally,

putting all the pieces of the puzzle together and knowing that I had created the image of the "puzzle" that was now completed and original was a highly satisfying feeling.

But more than anything, working under an interpretative paradigm was a chance to grow aware of the importance of some methodological aspects as well as a chance to improve some academic skills for research purposes. I will first describe the learning derived from the process of data collection, to later describe the experience of data analysis. No reflections will be presented about the stage of writing this piece of work, since I feel I would need a distance which I do not possess at this time.

One of the earlier "lessons" I derived from the study was the importance of interactive decision-making on the part of the researcher. Sometimes my own capacity for reaction was not quick enough. One of the problems I encountered was that my initial research statement (learner training), though interesting, was not adequate for my purposes nor my position as an "outsider" at the school and unfortunately I did not come to that realization till later on. If I had reacted quickly, I could have overcome that first "mistake" and redesigned again a new plan of data collection that included more of the participants' (especially the teachers') specific interpretations about structuring language-learning tasks. But I never got to do that fully in spite of the fact that one of the teachers, Sharon, in many ways and on different occasions offered to contribute to the study more actively. Unfortunately, later on during data analysis, I would often miss that type of information (more of the participants' views), which in my opinion is one of the major limitations of this study. Even though my classroom



observations soon focused on structuring language-learning tasks, I also kept collecting data the way I had planned initially (interviewing ten teachers and analyzing learner training material). In addition to all that work (almost two projects in one) I self-imposed the task of transcribing the lessons the same week I recorded them. Everything together was an immense load of work and probably contributed to this poor capacity for reflection and reaction during data collection with repercussions to the study as a whole.

Another "lesson" regards the issue of entry to the site. I did not recognize how crucial it was until after the data was collected. I realized that some problems that I had had during data collection could probably be traced back to an uninformative or "shy" entry to the site of investigation.

When I asked for permission to observe the teachers I only told them I would visit them periodically. I did not tell them that it was possible that I would be audio recording them later on, nor that I would probably like to interview them. This lack of information at the very beginning (about the demands of participating in a study like this) made me uneasy later on and probably discouraged me from interviewing teachers more often, even though the rapport with the three teachers was excellent and it seemed to me that they did not feel any resentment for this initial lack of information.

This lack of information towards the teachers as regards the research statement was certainly influenced by my resolution to keep the topic of the research (structuring) covert, under the assumption that this knowledge would make the teachers overconscious. Although this procedure is not usually advocated in

qualitative research manuals, I am still not sure this would have been the right procedure to take in this specific study.

My introduction to the students was not adequate, either. I left it to the teachers to introduce me and since they knew little about what I was going to do, for how long, why etc., they could not say much to them either. Probably having made students more participative of the information about the project would have avoided some of the students' initial reactions against being observed, especially to being recorded. This initial attitude of mine towards the students probably came from an overconcern for my presence in the classes; I wanted to go as unobtrusively as possible. That's why at the very beginning of the year I used to sit at the back of the room and did not move. However, as the year progressed I became more comfortable with sitting nearer where students were.

One third aspect of fieldwork that I became progressively concerned with was the problem of researching a somewhat familiar context, more particularly the fact that some of the information that this study reveals may have an unwanted effect on the teachers involved in the study or my relationship with them. I had thought that the interpretative paradigm would prevent dangerous knowledge from coming out of the study. But I feel this is not what has happened. Even though a non-prescriptive approach has been the objective, I feel there are certain occasions where qualitative differences in the teaching of the three teachers are written c. can be read into the text.

My final reflection about data collection is the realization that qualitative techniques for data collection can be especially difficult in some settings, like the one I have examined. Qualitative techniques may be especially appropriate in schools where both students and teachers are at the school for many hours a day. It may be also handy to have classrooms that are prepared to record lessons or that offer optimal physical conditions to record. These were characteristics that the setting I came into contact with lacked. The teachers at the language school taught at various sites in the city. Even if I went there before or stayed at the Schools after class, teachers were busy. They usually had another class before or after. As I have mentioned before, one of the classrooms was very big and this impoverished the quality of the recording too. In addition, the machinery for recording was excessively voluminous and since I was recording at different sites I had to mount and dismount everything quickly and carry it up and down, in and out of the buildings. Of course this was not a major problem, but it is a factor that I did not consider seriously at the start of the study and would in the future.

As to the methodological reflections about data analysis, I have learned that finding suitable means of organizing the data and referring to it are quite important to economize on time. For example, I felt obliged to modify the system of indexing in the transcripts, which represented some added working time that could have been avoided if anticipated. I did not make use of any computer program either, something which would have helped me in the management of information.

Another more important skill I did not make full use of most of the time was that of monitoring my work. Sometimes I spent days or weeks researching a topic too thoroughly or with a perspective only to later on find out that that information would not be useful or that I was not satisfied with a particular way of presenting something I perceived in the data. The examples are numerous. On one occasion, I started measuring how long preparatory segments lasted before really being convinced that that information would be useful to me. In the end, that information has not actually been used in this study. On another occasion, I constructed sophisticated diagrams to show the changes in topic, grammar focus, participation mode . . . from task to task. Again, those diagrams have not proved relevant to my purposes. Hopefully, as the analysis of the data progressed I learnt to monitor my work more constantly and strongly, and to economize on time and effort.

In this, my last point about data analysis, I am going to comment on its difficulty. I did not expect to go through such a period of lack of direction in the process of data analysis as I did. At times when I got stuck I felt it was more of a personal problem rather than a characteristic of this type of research. Later on I realized that the apparent "chaos" of some stages during the analysis of the data was inherent to the method, as is described by several authors:

Qualitative data analysis is an effort to construct order out of the booming, buzzing confusion that stands before the researcher. The task is difficult. (Webb and Glesne, 1992, p. 796)

Regardless of how well a step-by-step procedure for data analysis is spelled out, there are times when even the most experienced researcher feels deadlocked in the process of analysis. (Merriam, 1991, p. 147)

Almost everything that I did not do, did not do properly or was not aware of that I have mentioned in this section were things that I knew in theory, that I had read about. Interesting and informative as manuals for qualitative research are, I am afraid that an important part of learning how to "move" in the setting and read into the raw data for a "novice" researcher is learned mainly by the experience of conducting qualitative research. In my case I feel I have gained some knowledge from every stage of the research. The learning I have derived from each of those stages, I feel, has been great and solid.

In short, interpretative research is painstaking for the researcher who is "new" to its techniques. The process of data collection is slow and time-consuming and the process of data analysis is also not a straightforward activity. Nevertheless, the difficulty of the method is counterbalanced by the attractiveness of its thoroughness and its open-endedness. The experience of conducting a piece of interpretative research can be a very fulfilling experience for the researcher. The contact with the participants is attractive, the data is not anonymous. And it is gratifying to construct through inductive understanding. On balance, it was for me a valuable experience and one that I recommend other doctoral students give themselves the opportunity to experience.

