

OBSERVATION AS AN EVALUATION TECHNIQUE

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Based on the findings from EFL classrooms observations, the author gives a description of current teaching practices and evaluates the teaching approach in relation to the principles of modern language teaching.

There is no substitute for direct observation as a way of finding out about language classrooms.
(Nunan: Understanding languageclassrooms, p. 76)

INTRODUCTION

The social character of the language was stressed long time ago. The roles of the participants in a social situation influence their speech in terms of the amount of talk, turn taking, language functions and so on. Therefore, the analysis of discourse produced in a particular speech situation takes into consideration the participants' positions in it.

Classroom is a speech situation whose participants are the teacher and learners. In a foreign language classroom the positions of its participants are not the same with reference to language knowledge which is the aim and means of their verbal interaction. This inequality is reflected in the basic features of language use, as mentioned above.

The teacher and learners in a foreign language classroom gather in this social situation for a specific purpose, the purpose of learning (as defined by A. M. Thomas, 1987; 14). In the FL classroom the teacher knows the language and the learners do not. So, he/she is required to transmit a body of knowledge and skills to the learners.

In a FL classroom the process of language learning is realized by means of interaction. The structure of verbal exchanges in a language classroom interaction is traditionally presented as Initiation-Response-Feedback. So, classroom interaction is not a one-way process, the teacher does not only transmit the language knowledge to the learners but also provides opportunities for them to use the acquired knowledge to produce utterances in a FL and then evaluates their verbal production. Such behaviour is closely connected to the previously mentioned teacher position in the classroom.

The final scope of language learning is seen as the ability to engage successfully in various speech situations in natural conversation. For this purpose, learners should be given the opportunity to engage in those communicative situations that will enable them to use and develop the communicative strategies that are used in everyday conversation. With reference to what was said before this means that there are two types of communication going on in the classroom: the so called "pseudocommunication" and real communication. While pseudocommunication refers to requesting and giving information that are highly predictable, real communication refers to requesting information that we do not possess or to giving information that is unknown to the interlocutor. These two types of communication take place simultaneously in the classroom. But, besides this communicative level in the FL classroom there exists a metacommunicative level. It refers to communication about the language which is characteristic of language classroom since the language is the object of communication as well. Today's approach to FLL gives priority to real communication, and to communication in general. What type of communication will prevail depends on the type of the lesson, aim of the lesson, language level and so on.

AIM

The aim of this paper is to describe classroom talk in terms of the amount of talk of its participants, type of communication, participation in verbal exchanges, content and purpose of communication. In this way we want to describe the basic characteristics of talk produced in this social situation.

The paper aims to answer to the following questions:

1. To what extent do the characteristics of this social situation influence the features of classroom talk.
2. To what extent are the features of the observed classroom talk in accordance with the present day teaching principles.

SAMPLE

The analysis was made on the basis of 11 transcribed samples of tape-recorded teacher-pupil verbal interaction in the E. F. L. classroom. The average length of the recordings is about 15 minutes (min. 10 - max. 19). The cause of the varying length should primarily be seen in the observer's wish not to interrupt the communicative exchange.

9 recordings were made in primary schools (the 5th, 6th and 7th grade), 1 in a secondary school and 1 in a school for foreign languages. The number of observed teachers is 11.

The recorded samples cover elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate level. The same type of lesson was observed in all the classrooms. It can be described as the revision of the previously taken lesson. The analyst's wish was to compare teachers' verbal behaviour in the same lesson type.

METHODOLOGY

A special observation schedule was developed for this investigation. It consists of 5 categories. They are: amount of talk, type of interaction, nature of exchanges, content of communication and purpose of communication.

The first category refers to the amount of both teacher and learner talk in the classroom. The second category deals with the types of communication that were found in the corpus. They are: T-Ls, T-L, L-T, L-L, L-Ls and Ls-L(T). Their presence in all the recordings was noted down. The third category, "nature of exchanges" aims to analyze teacher and learner behaviour in the classroom in terms of general pedagogic moves: Structuring (or Framing), Soliciting (or Initiating), Responding and Reacting (Follow up). The fourth category covers the content of communication. A distinction is made between pedagogic and genuine communication, where pedagogic communication refers to pseudo communication in which the speaker already possesses the information requested while in genuine communication the information requested is not known in advance. The analysis of classroom talk at this level was to find out whether the type of observed activity, which is highly predictable in terms of content of communication, is seen as the opportunity to introduce genuine communication which is highly desirable with reference to current aims of FLT. Finally, the fifth category, which is closely connected with the fourth one gives us more data on the purpose of communication. Here a distinction is made between requesting information and giving information. Each of these behaviours was further subdivided in terms of the content of requested or given information. Thus, a distinction is made between predictable and unpredictable information in communication on extralinguistic or linguistic level. The third subcategory refers to giving and requesting information on classroom procedures.

Finally, the unit of analysis had to be decided upon. An utterance or part of an utterance that has a different or repeated meaning from the previous one was taken as a unit of analysis. By means of this type of segmentation of discourse, we were able to identify the type of verbal behaviour whenever it occurred.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a) Amount of talk

Rec.	Teacher	(%)	Learner	(%)
R1	92	(70. 22)	39	(29. 77)
R2	102	(67. 11)	50	(32. 89)
R3	99	(71. 74)	39	(28. 26)
R4	65	(67. 70)	31	(32. 29)
R5	111	(72. 07)	43	(27. 92)
R6	133	(72. 67)	50	(27. 32)
R7	79	(58. 52)	56	(41. 48)
R8	174	(72. 80)	65	(27. 20)
R9	96	(65. 31)	51	(34. 68)
R10	157	(67. 09)	77	(32. 91)
R11	59	(54. 13)	50	(45. 87)
Total	1167	(67. 93)	551	(32. 07)

Table 1 summarizes the overall amount of teacher and learner talk found in the observed transcripts. Students accounted for 27 % to 46% of the total talk, including instances of both choral and individual speech. The teachers accounted for 55% to 72%, with a median of 68%. Interteacher variability may be noticed, as well as variability depending on the size of learner group and type of communication activity. These results confirm the standard first language finding of about two-thirds of classroom speech being attributable to the teacher.

The amount of teacher talk is closely connected to the structure of exchanges in the language classroom.

b) Nature of exchanges

	Teacher talk					Learner talk						
	Fr	-	I	-	R	-	F	I	-	R	-	F
R1			58		1		33			39		
R2	3		40				59			50		
R3	12		38				49			39		
R4	3		30				32			31		
R5	2		51		1		57			38		5
R6	14		63		4		52			50		
R7	8		28				43	13		37		6
R8	17		90		1		66			65		
R9	4		45		3		44			50		1
R10	5		69				83	1		72		4

R11	3	9	2	45	20	30	
Total	71	521	12	563	34	501	16
%	4.13	30.33	0.70	32.77	1.99	29.16	0.93

Fr - Framing I - Initiation R - Response F - Feedback

In terms of types of moves, the teachers produced 100% of structuring moves (framing), around 94% of the initiating moves, 97% of reacting moves (feedback) and about 2% of responding moves.

Structuring moves accounted for about 6% of the total teacher moves, initiating moves 45%, reacting moves 48%, and responding moves about 1%.

As for learner talk the results are the following: learners produced around 6% of initiating moves, 98% of responding moves and about 3% of reacting moves. Initiating moves accounted for about 5% or more of the total learner moves, responding moves 91%, and reacting moves about 4%.

All the structuring moves were done by the teacher. Almost all initiations and feedback (or reactions according to Bellack) were done by the teacher. Majority of responding moves were made by learners. The proportions of structuring, soliciting, responding and reacting moves is about 4/32/30/34. These proportions are very much similar to the ones obtained by research in first language classrooms where the proportions were 10/30/30/30 (cf. Bellack et al. 1966 and Dunkin and Biddle 1974 as reported in Chaudron, 1988). However, we have to notice that teachers tend to do most of talking, about 63% of the moves as soliciting and reacting moves, while students utter most of the responding moves. It is just because of this structure of exchanges and teachers' production of the majority of soliciting and reacting moves that teachers still dominate classroom speech no matter what approach is being used.

We can also note variability in recordings.

c) Interaction pattern

	T-Ls	T-L	L-T	L-L	L-Ls	Ls-L(T)
R1	4	88	37	2		
R2	2	100	49	1		
R3	87	12	8			31
R4	4	61	25			6
R5	24	87	32			11
R6	63	70	27			23
R7	6	73	21		27	8
R8	34	140	53			12
R9	20	76	41			10
R10	24	133	63		2	12
R11	3	56	17	24	9	
Total	271	896	373	27	38	113
%	15.77	52.15	21.71	1.57	2.21	6.58

The most frequent type of interaction is T-L. The interaction is not reciprocal because of two main features of teacher talk: provision of feedback to a certain extent and modifications in teacher talk. Teachers often tend to repeat their initiations or to modify them. So, it is not surprising that T-L interaction is more than twice more frequent than L-T interaction. Still, the latter is the second in frequency. So, we may say that most of classroom interaction takes place between the teacher and an individual learner. In this way a learner is given opportunity to express himself in a foreign language. It is surprising that with this type of activity there is a significant amount of teacher talk to all the learners. The teacher usually puts a question to the class, without nominating any learner and therefore they all answer or some of them. In such situations it seems that the teacher is not interested in the linguistic ability of a particular learner but in learners' general knowledge. Interesting enough is the fact that L-L interaction was the least in frequency. It was significantly present only in one recording. It is the recording in which learner amount of speech was the biggest. But we must also say that it was the only recording that comprised a small size group (eight learners).

d) Content

	Pedagogic	Genuine
R1	83.97	16.03
R2	96.05	3.95
R3	97.10	2.90
R4	94.80	5.20
R5	75.32	24.68
R6	100	
R7	100	
R8	36.40	63.60
R9	95.92	4.08
R10	76.92	23.08
R11	100	
Total	83.35	16.65

Pedagogic content dominates the classroom interaction in the observed corpus. Genuine communication is slightly present. But taking into consideration the type of lesson this amount should not be neglected. This is particularly important since genuine communication was present in 8 recordings (out of 11) and in one of them it is more present than pedagogic communication. We think that these results show the awareness of the language teachers of the necessity to introduce genuine communication even in the learning activities that are basically pedagogic.

e) Purpose of communication-teacher talk

Requesting information					
	1. extralinguistic c.		2. linguistic c.		3. procedures
	predict.	unpredict.	predict.	unpredict.	
R1	29	12	10		
R2	37	2	3	2	1
R3	17	2	22		
R4	27	3		2	
R5	23	16	5		6
R6	47	1	7		
R7	12	1			
R8	24	64	3	2	
R9	40	3	2		
R10	53	13			
R11	5				
Total	314	116	53	6	7
%	18,28	6.75	3.8	0.35	0,41

Giving information					
	1. extralinguistic c.		2. linguistic c.		3. procedures
	predict.	unpredict.	predict.	unpredict.	
R1	23		14	1	3
R2	27	1	18	5	6
R3	15		35		8
R4	23	2	8		
R5	42	1	11		7
R6	37	2	20		19
R7	20		21		25
R8	46	10	13		12
R9	33		11		7
R10	51	12	16	1	11
R11	22		22		10
Total	339	28	189	7	108
&	19.73	1.63	11.00	0.41	6.29
Total II (%)	38.01	8.38	14.08	0.76	6.70

Teachers mostly request and give information on predictable extralinguistic content. They usually put questions on the well-known content and upon learner response they repeat the information or add something to it. The second in frequency is communication about linguistic content. Giving predictable information on language is more frequent than asking about or checking language appropriacy. This indicates that provision of the correct form of the wrong part of the learner utterance is more frequent than making the learner self-correct his utterance. The third in frequency is communication on unpredictable content. Requesting is more frequent than giving information. Teachers show the tendency to elicit the unpredictable verbal behaviour from the point of view of content than to participate themselves in such communication. Other purposes of teacher talk are poorly present so there is no need for elaborating on them. Maybe, it might be necessary to point out teacher participation in responding moves since the percentage obtained in this research is lower than the results obtained in the first language classroom. While in our corpus the teachers produced only 2% of responding moves in the first language classroom they produced 5% of these moves. So, the observed Croatian teachers tend to let or make their learners produce the correct answer. Our teachers do not seem to have problem with the waiting time. On the basis of the inspection of our transcripts we can see that they use a lot of strategies to make their learners produce the utterance. Just because of the low percentage of responding moves the teachers seem to be well aware of the scope of language learning and that is developing the target language system.

We can also point out that a significant variety among recordings is evident in relationship between communication on predictable and unpredictable extralinguistic content.

e) Purpose of communication - learner talk

	Requesting information				
	1. extralinguistic c.		2. linguistic c.		3. procedures
	predict.	unpredict.	predict.	unpredict.	
R1					
R2					
R3					
R4					
R5					
R6					
R7	16				1
R8					
R9					
R10		1			
R11	21				
Total	37	1			1
%	2.15	0.01			0.01

	Giving information				
	1. extralinguistic c.		2. linguistic c.		3. procedures
	predict.	unpredict.	predict.	unpredict.	
R1	21	7	10	1	
R2	42	2	5	1	
R3	11	2	26		
R4	25	2	2	2	
R5	22	16	5		
R6	42	1	7		
R7	34		5		
R8	18	40	5	2	
R9	48	1	2		
R10	47	25	4		
R11	21		8		
Total	331	96	79	6	
&	19.27	5.59	4.60	0.35	
Total II (%)	21.42	5.60	4.60	0.36	

The above tables show that in learner talk providing information is much more frequent than giving information. About 19% of classroom talk covers learner giving information on predictable content. Only about 5 or 6% present giving information on unpredictable content. The third in frequency is giving information on language. So, metalinguistic function with this type of activity is still prominent. Other functions are poorly present or not present at all.

CONCLUSION

Summing up the results of the analyses made on our corpus we may conclude that 2/3 of classroom talk are produced by the teachers and 1/3 by learners. The majority of initiating and reacting moves and all structuring moves are produced by the teacher while most of the responding moves are made by learners. These data prove again that teachers dominate classroom talk. They control the flow of talk, decide on turn takings and stop or interrupt the conversation. They evaluate the classroom talk as well.

The data obtained by other categories tell us that T-L and L. T interaction are the highest in frequency. So, as opposed to the large amount of T-Ls and Ls-T communication which was characteristic for audiolingual methods, today learning is seen as an individual process and each learner is given opportunity to produce language. As for the content of communication in our corpus it is mainly pedagogic. This is not surprising with reference to the type of lesson. Just because

of that the percentage of genuine communication should not be neglected since it shows teachers' tendency to introduce genuine communication in the majority of communicative tasks. It also shows that teachers are aware of the final scope of language learning.

As for the purpose of classroom communication the obtained results show that the general purpose is purely pedagogic one: to check whether the learners have learned the new extralinguistic content and whether they are able to express it by means of correct and acceptable structures. Although they communicate about extralinguistic content it is the language content that is constantly being evaluated, or checked. Here a separate analysis could be made for each recording since it will tell us a lot about the teaching methodology of a particular teacher. Some teachers with the observed type of activity constantly check the language understanding and knowledge, some insist on extralinguistic pedagogic communication and some tend to introduce a lot of genuine communication.

Speaking about differences among teachers that are evident in our observation tables we would like to point out the usefulness of observation for an inservice teacher. Our observation was made by an outside expert and therefore its purpose was different from the one an in service teacher might have. Observation seems the best or one of the best ways to get insight into your own teaching and thus to learn about your own teaching. Teachers often have beliefs about their own teaching and it happens, frequently enough, that, when faced with the recordings or transcripts of their lessons, they ask: "Oh, did I really say this?" or "I can't believe I did that". So, observing own classroom talk might be useful for awareness raising. The teachers may get better insight into what they do but at the same time they can become self-evaluators. They might wish to change some features of their verbal behaviour and thus take and promote different type of responsibility for their own teaching. In my opinion teacher development does not only include introduction of new techniques and materials but constant inspection of what they do and what results they obtain. Taking responsibility has become very popular today. We constantly speak about learners' taking responsibility for the learning process and I think we can also stress the teachers' taking responsibility for the teaching process and point out their interrelationship.

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Sanja Čurković Kalebić: Promatranje kao tehnika vrednovanja

S a ž e t a k

Na osnovi snimaka razrednog dijaloga u nastavi engleskoga kao stranog jezika u radu se daje opis suvremene nastavne prakse i vrednuje nastavni pristup s obzirom na principe suvremene nastave stranog jezika.