

## DURING THE LESSON

1. Use the chart to help you monitor the teacher's classroom language.
2. Script a chunk of teacher meta-language (do this about five times altogether during the lesson).
3. State what you understand to be the teacher's communicative purpose.
4. Briefly describe the immediate context.
5. Consider how the same meaning might be delivered to a native speaker.

What does the teacher say?	What is the communicative purpose?	What is the immediate context?	How might this be said to a native speaker?
'Look at the map. Can you see the bank?'	- Giving instructions - Checking comprehension	T. is setting up a task with a visual aid (map)	'Can you see where the bank is (on the map)?'

## 2.1 The teacher's meta-language

## AFTER THE LESSON

1. Consider the communicative purpose of the various teacher utterances. Consider in what ways the communication was purposeful. Was the purpose immediately obvious to the students? Consider the meta-language from the point of view of the generalisations that learners might make about the target language.

2. Look at the chunks of teacher language that you scripted. What comment would you make on the level of meta-language compared to the level of any 'formal language input' in the lesson? Is the meta-language adjusted downwards? If not, should it be? Are there any other ways open to a teacher to ease comprehension of meta-language?
3. Were any patterns evident? Willis (1981:1) writes that 'language is much better learnt through real use than through patterns and drills'. Sometimes, though, the teacher's meta-language may be seen as patterned behaviour, which may serve, over time, as a type of authentic, communicative drill.

Were there any chunks of teacher talk that you observed that potentially might become 'pattern drills'?

4. What features of the immediate context supported the teacher's meta-language? What can a teacher do to heighten contextual clues?
5. a) The potential of meta-language to be a rich source of learning for the student raises some important issues. Widdowson (1990: 67) writes:

It has been traditionally supposed that the language presented to learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. Nowadays there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic. How is it to be graded so that it can be made accessible? Is simplification as a pedagogic strategy inconsistent with the principles of a communicative approach to language teaching?

Here Widdowson is talking about the language actually presented as model language. However, we can apply his remarks to meta-language as well. If we believe that meta-language is a rich source of language data and potential learning to learners, then of what significance are the accommodations we make to simplify the incoming message to the learner? Do they, through simplification, help the learner access the target language or do they delay mastery by being an inauthentic model?

- b) Reflect on the notes you made in the far right column of the chart and consider whether any accommodation was made to the learner in regard to level and what sort of accommodation this was.
- c) Can we reconcile the need for meta-language to be 'easy' with the importance of learners' being surrounded by and exposed to authentic language data?
6. In groups of four, try this role-play exercise.

A = the teacher B = low-level student C = native speaker  
D = observer

- A gives B instructions for doing a particular activity, for example, lighting a fire, putting on nail polish, starting a car, loading a dishwasher.
- Then A tells C the same instructions.
- D observes, takes notes, and leads the discussion at the end on the differences in language (verbal and non-verbal) between the first set of instructions and the second.

### REFLECTION

Has this task increased your awareness of issues related to classroom teacher talk? Is there anything you would like to pursue further?

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The material in this task is derived in part from work by Ray Litster.

## 2.2 The language of questions

### BACKGROUND

Language teachers ask a lot of questions. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) found that questions are one of the commonest types of utterances in the discourse of classrooms. Questions can have different purposes, for example, socialising, scene setting, checking vocabulary, checking learning and seeking opinion. While teachers often plan their questions in terms of the lesson's content, they seem to place less emphasis on considering their questions in terms of the cognitive and linguistic demands made on the learner. These demands relate to both decoding the question and encoding the response.

### TASK OBJECTIVE

This task aims to have you collect some questions and question-and-answer sets from a language lesson. The data collected will be classified and analysed.

### PROCEDURE

#### BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Arrange to observe a lesson.
2. Read right through this task.

#### DURING THE LESSON

1. Listen carefully to the teacher's questions. Collect about twenty of these in roughly chronological order.
2. Now listen for some teacher question-student answer 'sets'. A set here means an exchange between teacher and student, initiated by the teacher's question. It might be as simple as a pair: for example, teacher question + student answer; or more complex: for example, teacher question + teacher reformulation + student response + another student response. The boundaries of the set are usually quite clear.

Try to record about five of these faithfully. They may come from anywhere in the lesson.

#### AFTER THE LESSON

1. Looking first at the twenty single questions you have collected, consider these from the point of view of the expected response. It may help to write in a sample response for each question.
2. Now classify the questions into categories on the basis of the expected response. Some suggested categories are given below. There is some overlap among these, and of course other categories might be used instead of or in addition to these. You may like to set up a number of binary categories and classify questions accordingly, for example, questions that require students to share previous knowledge versus those that require information just presented; or questions for which the teacher is seeking a 'form' answer versus questions where the teacher is interested in the meaning of the response.

Here are some other question types. It may help to decide first on the framework you will be working with.

- *Yes/no questions*, e.g. 'Here is a picture of a woman. Have you seen her face before?'
- *Short answer/retrieval-style questions*, e.g. 'What did she say about the film?'
- *Open-ended questions*, e.g. 'Whom could he have telephoned?'
- *Display questions* (questions requesting information already known to the questioner), e.g. 'What colour is this pen?'
- *Referential questions* (questions requesting new information), e.g. 'What did you study at university?'
- *Non-retrieval, imaginative questions* (questions that do not require the learner to retrieve given information but instead call on inferred information or information in which an opinion or judgement is called for), e.g. 'What do you think the writer was suggesting by making the central character an animal?'

## 2 Language

3. What *pattern*, if any, emerges from the classification of your questions? Can you point to any *factors* that might help account for this, for example, the type of lesson it was, the stage of the lesson from which the questions came, the age of the students, etc.?
4. Consider the notion of *difficulty* from the learner's point of view. Rank a selection of your collected questions on to a cline of easy → more difficult → difficult. What are the factors that increase difficulty?
5. Consider now the *question-and-answer sets* you have recorded. Rank the five in order of complexity of response so that (1) will be the response requiring the least challenge to the student and (5) will be the response requiring the greatest challenge.
6. Is there any correlation between the *type of question* and the *complexity of response* elicited?
7. What comment can you make on this remark:

The teacher must have a clear and explicit understanding of the nature of the challenge to students' internal representation of knowledge that a particular question may present . . . They must appreciate the level of cognitive difficulty involved in the students' effort to respond to a particular question. (Tollefson 1989)

## REFLECTION

Using this observation as a mirror of your own teaching, consider how you approach the design of questions in your lessons. Has this observation in any way increased your awareness of the skill of questioning? If you were to pursue this line of thinking in relation to your teaching, what aspects would you be keen to explore?

## 2.3 The language of feedback to error

### BACKGROUND

The language of feedback refers to the responses given by the teacher to what learners produce in the classroom. In its most narrow definition, this refers to teacher response to error. Most teachers are aware of feedback in terms of its motivational value – the value of positive feedback and the dis-incentive that negative reinforcement can produce. However, apart from the motivational aspects of providing feedback, there are linguistic and cognitive reasons for teachers to consider closely how they respond. The exact content of the teacher's response as it relates to the learner's production may well have an important influence on the learning process.

### TASK OBJECTIVE

You will be observing a lesson in order to concentrate on the language of feedback to error. This means recording/collecting data of a number of student-teacher interactions, often with four *utterance components*: teacher question + student response + teacher feedback + student response to feedback.

### PROCEDURE

#### BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Arrange to observe a lesson.
2. Make yourself familiar with the four-utterance paradigm that you are seeking (see example overleaf).

#### DURING THE LESSON

1. Collect some samples of the four-utterance paradigm. We are especially looking for examples that include learner error and teacher feedback to error. It does not matter if they do not all fit neatly into the sample schema.
2. Wherever you can, note any non-verbal and supplementary support that is given to the information, for example, use of the board, visual, gesture.
3. Consider whether the feedback was generally positive and encouraging (+) or negative and discouraging (-).

Sample	Supplementary support	+ -
Teacher question		
Student response		
Teacher feedback		
Student response to feedback		

## 2.3 The language of feedback to error

## AFTER THE LESSON

1. Feedback, according to Brown (1988:16), has to be genuinely responsive: 'It means allowing learners to experience the effect of what they produce as a guide . . . in their future efforts.' Brown believes that feedback must be more than encouragement, for 'empty and automatic encouragement is often pointless' (*ibid.*). A genuine response from the teacher provides some indication to learners of the effectiveness of their utterances.

What implications do you think this has for the language of teacher feedback? Consider the data collected during this lesson in the light of whether the learners 'experienced the effect' of their errors through their teacher.

2. It has been said (Zamel 1981) that the information component of teacher feedback is crucial to the learner's learning process. According to Zamel, feedback is most effective when it:

- points out critical features of the language;
- gives information that allows the student 'to discover by oneself' rules and principles of language;
- reduces ambiguity of choice for the learner.

Analyse the data you have collected. Look closely at the *information content* of the teacher's feedback. To what extent is the teacher, in the feedback, providing for the learner:

## 2.3 The language of feedback to error

- information that explicitly and specifically highlights where the error is?
  - information that defines what the choices are, thereby reducing the alternatives open to the learner?
  - information that helps the learner correctly adjust their current understanding?
3. On the basis of your analysis, comment now on the language of feedback in these terms:
- a) Was the information supported by other messages through different media, such as gesture, visual?
  - b) Was the message appropriately limited (not overloaded)? Did it reduce, rather than increase, ambiguity?
4. The assumption underlying the considerations given here to the language of feedback is that the language learner is 'an active and selective information-gatherer who acquires and interprets new information on the basis of rules already stored in the brain' (Smith 1971).

This is a cognitive rather than a behaviourist view of the learner: students have their own 'criterial sets', their own understanding of how the language is organised. Each production of language is a testing out of internal hypotheses. Feedback from the teacher may result in a slight adjustment of the original hypotheses.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view of the language learner and language learning? Why may it cause confusion to say 'good' to a wrong answer?

5. Do you agree with the view that one of the teacher's key roles in the classroom is to provide accurate feedback on error to learners?
6. With regard to classroom roles, consider this statement:

The teacher's output becomes the input for the student and determines future performance and the student's output becomes the input for the teacher and determines the reaction to that performance . . . Teaching and learning are no longer exclusive roles; they become the provinces of both performers in the classroom: while the teacher instructs, the teacher learns about what must be done next, and while the learner learns, the student gives instruction about what information is lacking.

(Zamel 1981: 149)

7. When you collected the data for this task you also noted whether the teacher's response was encouraging or discouraging from the perspective of the learner. To what extent do you consider that the teacher's role, in response to feedback, has a motivational function? Some teachers, for example, consider that they should not be involved in praise or criticism of the students (Edge 1989). Some claim this is the case with adult learners but that children require

ERWEITERTE BEOBACHTUNGSPERSPEKTIVE:

UNTERRICHTSPHASEN

1. Einführung und Erläuterung

- wann wird der neue Unterrichtsstoff eingeführt ?
- wie wird er eingeführt ?
- woher weiß der Kursleiter, daß die Teilnehmer mitkommen ?
- wie wird Grammatik erklärt ?  
(Mutter-/Zielsprache, regelgeleitet - induktiv etc.)
- wie wird mit Aussprache und Betonung umgegangen ?

2. Übung / Festigung

- wann üben die Teilnehmer den neuen Unterrichtsstoff ?
- wie wird geübt ?
- wie lange wird geübt ?
- wie wird kontrolliert/geprüft, ob genug geübt wurde ?
- werden zusätzliche Mittel eingesetzt, um den neu erlernten Unterrichtsstoff zu festigen ? wenn ja, welche ?

3. Obertragung

- wird der neue Unterrichtsstoff auf die persönliche Situation/ die persönlichen Bedürfnisse der Teilnehmer übertragen ?
- wie wird das gemacht ? (bitte ein Beispiel)
- wann findet die Übertragung auf die eigene Situation der Teilnehmer statt ?

geht die Übertragung auf die eigene Situation von Teilnehmern oder vom Kursleiter aus ?

4. Fertigkeiten

- welche Fertigkeiten werden gelehrt ?
- in welcher Reihenfolge ?
- welche Gewichtung kommt den Fertigkeiten zu ?

5. Lerntempo und Methodenwechsel

- wird ein Methodenwechsel deutlich ?
- gibt es Unterschiede im Tempo in den verschiedenen Unterrichtsphasen ?  
wenn ja, welcher Art ?
- ändert sich die Rolle des Kursleiters während der verschiedenen Unterrichtsphasen ?

6. Oberprüfung

- überprüft der Kursleiter, ob das Gelernte behalten/verstanden wurde ? wenn ja, wie ?
- gibt es Möglichkeiten der Selbstüberprüfung für die Teilnehmer ?
- macht der Kursleiter Unterschiede in der Wichtigkeit des neuen Stoffes deutlich (z.B. Wörter, die unbedingt gelernt werden bzw. solche, die nur ungefähr verstanden werden müssen) ?

**BEOBSACHTUNGSPERSPEKTIVE: TEXTBEHANDLUNG**

1. Um was für einen Text, um welche Textsorte handelt es sich ?

Lehrbuchtext: \_\_\_\_\_

literar. Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Dokument (z.B. Zeitungsausschnitt): \_\_\_\_\_

Mischung verschiedener Texte:

Textsorte (z.B. Brief, Zeitungsmeldung, Dialog, Interview, ...):

2. Der Text wird vorwiegend behandelt

\_\_\_ im Hinblick auf seinen Inhalt

\_\_\_ im Hinblick auf seine Form, Gliederung, Aufbau

\_\_\_ im Hinblick auf sprachliche Einzelheiten, z.B. unbekannte Wörter und Wendungen

3. Ist der Text, soweit Sie es erkennen konnten, für die Klasse neu \_\_\_ oder wurde er schon vorher eingeführt/behandelt ?

4. Wieviel Zeit wird insgesamt für die Textbehandlung verwendet ?

5. Wie wird der Text behandelt ? Haben die Kursteilnehmer Gelegenheit, eigene Stellungnahmen abzugeben (z.B. den Text ablehnen, andere Texte vorschlagen, eine evtl. vom Kursleiter abweichende Meinung zum Text/einer Textstelle äußern) ?

6. Wie wird die Textbehandlung vorbereitet, unterstützt, ausgewertet ?

\_\_\_ Vorentlastung durch Worterklärungen

\_\_\_ andere Art der Vorentlastung/ z.B. Medien

\_\_\_ Medien im Rahmen der Textbehandlung: \_\_\_\_\_

anschließende Übungen, Spiele, Rollenspiele:

**ERWEITERTE BEOBSACHTUNGSPERSPEKTIVE:**

**TEXTBEHANDLUNG**

- bitte kreuzen Sie jeweils an

1. wird den Kursteilnehmern gesagt, warum ein bestimmter Text behandelt wird / ausgewählt wurde ?

Ja 0                      Nein 0

2. findet eine Hinführung zum Text statt ?

ja 0 dann wie ? \_\_\_\_\_

nein 0

3. wird vor der Textbehandlung Vorwissen der Teilnehmer reaktiviert ?

ja 0 dann wie ? \_\_\_\_\_

nein 0

4. werden vor der Textbehandlung unbekannte Wörter erklärt ?

alle 0,            viele 0,            einige 0,            keine 0

5. entspricht der Text dem Interesse der meisten Kursteilnehmer ?

ja 0                      nein 0                      unklar 0

6. wodurch versucht der Kursleiter, das Interesse der Teilnehmer am Text zu wecken / zu erhalten ?

0 durch Übertragung auf die Situation der Teilnehmer

0 durch Medieneinsatz

0 durch Lernzielerläuterung

0 durch Mitteilung eigener Betroffenheit

0 durch ein strukturiertes Gespräch

0 \_\_\_\_\_

7. korrigiert der Kursleiter, wenn die Teilnehmer den Text lesen

0 die Aussprache

0 die Intonation

0 gar nichts

0 \_\_\_\_\_