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Alternatives to Questions: Language Use in UNIPREP Classroom Discussion

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Abstract

Student talk is linguistic output with potential for developing communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). In language classrooms turns of talk facilitate the meaning making process as students and teachers collaboratively come to understand the discourse of knowledge that they are co-constructing (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1999) in their interactions together, teacher to student and student to student. Questions shape the essential teaching exchange IRE/F as a teacher initiates (I) the first move, a student responds (R) and the teacher again takes up a turn and evaluates (E) in the follow-up (F) move. As common and useful as this exchange is for managing classroom behaviour, during the pivotal third turn in the essential teaching exchange (Young, 1992) there is potential for teachers to facilitate student talk when the teacher provides alternatives to a follow-up question (Dillon, 1988).

This case study of young adult English as a Second Language (ESL) users in face-to-face interaction in a university preparatory study skills course (UNIPREP) indicates a limiting influence of teacher questioning on student talk in discussions. Rather than talk being generated by a teacher's questioning, alternatives to questions lead to the increased length of turns in students' collaborative talk. This study brings a discourse analysis focus to whole class discussion between teacher and international UNIPREP students in the higher education sector and provides a context for second language acquisition researchers, teachers and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) trainers.

Introduction

A pedagogy is a practice that affects fundamental aspects of teaching and learning at the interface, where teachers meet students in their common interactions in the classroom. Types of questions – open-closed and display-negotiation – have been extensively analysed (Nassaji & Wells, 2000) to examine their impact on the content of interactions between teacher and student. Open questions such as "How does that athlete keep running?", closed questions as in "Is it 2 o'clock yet?", display questions such as "What is the capital city of Pakistan?" and negotiation questions like "What has she got to do to win?" are all used by teachers in exchanges that are a regular part of classroom life. Second language learning classes also make use of a range of question types. A teacher's cognitive challenge through a question of higher intellectual quality provides impetus to start classroom talk but it is not necessarily

conducive to discussion.

In this paper, we report a study of classroom discussion, focused on the teacher's cues to her students. Firstly, review is made of studies, notably by Dillon (1988), related to the role of teachers' questions in discussions. Then the methodology applied in this study is outlined, followed by the findings, which consist of sample reports of students' talk in response to a range of teachers' cues. A commentary is given on those findings, suggesting that a student's turn of talk is longer and ideas expressed through extended vocabulary more developed when a teacher promotes discussion free from interruption with additional questioning. Suggestions for further research into the influence of culture and gender are made.

Background

When a teacher poses a question for which there is a predetermined 'known' answer, the teacher occupies the role of 'primary knower' (Berry, 1981). The teacher poses a question and students are expected to provide a specific answer, the one that the teacher had in mind. Display questions are typical of teacher-fronted lessons in which transmission of knowledge from teacher to student is the expected form of interaction. Students become adept at reducing the length of their answers to conform to the teacher's preferred composition of the answer. Display questions are therefore not conducive to discussion, when students are expected to express ideas and elaborate them. The use of open questions does change the teacher's role to one of 'secondary knower'; the teacher does not have control of the knowledge that the student will provide. As students answer open questions, particularly of the negotiating kind, they have an opportunity to express their views, but even so their answers conform to the frame of the teacher's question.

Essential teaching exchange

The essential teaching exchange (Young, 1992) called triadic dialogue (Lemke, 1985) and known as IRE and IRF is the most common pattern of language interaction between teacher and students in a classroom. The exchange is well recognised as playing a key role in setting cognitive challenges for students and guiding the direction of learning through co-construction of concepts (Wells, 1999). In each exchange:

"I" = initiation move (first turn), usually a question asked by the teacher;
"R" = response move (second turn), a reply made by a student in response to the question;
"E" = evaluation move (third turn) of the student's response, also known as "F" = follow-up of the student response, usually made by the teacher.

A teacher's third turn becomes problematic in discussion when it includes a further question, even when the first question is an open one, such as in this example in which:

Teacher (T) initiates the first turn:
"I" – ***T: What do you do when you're under stress?***
Student responds in the second turn:
"R" – *L: Go shopping.*
Teacher follows up at the third turn:
"F" – ***T: Yes, some people like to go to the shops. Any other ones?***

The teacher's third turn (F) acknowledges the student's response (R) to the open question (I) by rephrasing the answer, but then includes another question, "Any other ones?". Dillon (1988) maintains that questions foil and frustrate discussion. He suggested, by way of contrast, that alternatives to questions foster discussion and further that, as students maintain the floor during discussions, they attain a higher quality of language output than when they respond to a teacher's questions. This observation is particularly noticeable at the third turn in traditional IRE/F exchanges, so teachers might consider alternatives to questioning if their students are to have opportunities to increase language output in a way that promotes discussion.

Alternatives to questioning

Alternatives at the third turn have been shown in Dillon's (1988) research to elicit higher quality talk from students in discussions and to increase the length of their utterances. Criticism has been levelled at teachers' use of the IRE pattern, claiming that triadic dialogue controls students' ideas and expression and limits the range of ways in which students can interact in a discussion in the classroom setting. From early sociolinguistic studies of the teacher's role in managing classroom interaction (Cazden, 1988; McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1985), transcribed texts have been used to analyse the essential teaching exchange (IRE). Generally research has been conducted in mainstream primary classrooms. This study brings those concepts into the higher education sector among international students preparing for their undergraduate and postgraduate studies at university where active participation in discussion rather than passive reception of information is regarded as a valued behaviour in the university tutorial setting.

The role of discussions

Discussion is considered a significant part of tutorial talk. By definition *discussion* is involved when people talk over a subject and if they investigate it by reasoning and argument. Other definitions include the concept of considering a question in open and usually informal debate, in addition to treating a topic formally in speech or writing. We contend that the metaphor of 'engagement with knowledge in discussion' is established, not more significantly by teachers' questions but by other forms of interaction in the classroom. As students engage with a teacher's response to their statements, and with reactions from other students to the teacher's initiating move, they become involved in discussion. In a tutorial setting students are expected to make contributions that are focused on a selected topic, rather than on a range of casual conversations that are more appropriate to a group of friends outside the classroom.

As *discussion*, the talk activity involves gathering information and soliciting opinion and provides an opportunity for students to talk. It is also an invitation to participate in the cognitive exercise of comparing other students' views of the world. In their multicultural UNIPREP classroom, there is scope for students to develop intercultural awareness while following discourse rules appropriate to the academic tutorial setting. This involves turn taking, waiting for a transitionally relevant place to make a contribution, making an orientation to the topic being discussed and facilitating the involvement of others in the group by allowing the expression of those personal views. During the pivotal third turn in the essential teaching exchange (Young, 1992), there is potential for teachers to facilitate student talk by providing an alternative to another follow-up question (Dillon, 1988). In so doing a metaphor for learning comes

from student contributions to one another's talk, with the teacher as active facilitator.

Among alternatives to questioning, Dillon (1994, pp. 77-85) provided the following:

- restatement of the student comment – *a Reflective Statement*
- reflection of teacher's views on the topic – *a Statement of Mind*
- a thought that occurs as a result of what the speaker was saying – *Declarative Statement*
- expressing an interest in a person's views – *Statement of Interest*
- referring to a previous statement of a speaker – *Speaker Referral*.

To the above five alternatives, we have included *back-channelling* in this study. Back-channel signals include a gesture, verbal signal or pause. Each signal allows students to hold or take back their turns and continue expressing a view.

Setting

The UNIPREP program provides coursework and face-to-face teaching in classrooms. Student talk is a valued component of the academic skills which are the focus of the program. There are four courses of study, one of which is Studying at University (SAU). As part of the speaking component of English language development in SAU, students are involved in critical thinking. Topics include independent learning, motivation, democratic discussion and cultural responses to seeking and accepting help.

Opportunities are created through such discussions for students to develop their communicative competence. The classroom offers a supportive environment for students to make propositions and have their peers comment, by adding to and by modifying understanding from personal experience and reading on the topics. The language that they generate is output that provides a means of enhancing their linguistic competence. A discussion forum within UNIPREP coursework was selected as the context for the study because it offered natural opportunities for the students to talk in which the teacher could provide reinforcement of their discussion points and manage turn-taking and the allocation of who might hold the floor next.

Method

A case study of adult ESL users in face-to-face interactions in a university preparatory study skills course (SAU) was chosen to investigate the influence of a teacher's questions on student talk.

Selection of teacher and course content

The program coordinator on campus was also the course team leader of SAU. That course had discussion topics incorporated from Week 5 in the 13 week program. As teacher of the study skills course amongst ESL users, she recognised that students needed to be active learners across the four macroskills, and to have opportunities to develop their oral skills. One well tried avenue to talk construction is discussion. Topics had been selected in the course materials that were relevant specifically to international students enrolled in a university preparation program. The teacher knew that the traditional IRE/F teaching exchange was characteristic of classroom talk that involves a teacher and students. Furthermore, she was prepared to focus her third turn moves on alternatives to a further question.

Selection of students and state of the program

The two UNIPREP SAU classes were involved. Weeks 5, 6, and 7 of a 13-week program were selected as appropriate for the study. The students by that stage had become familiar with the routines of classroom talk and had experience with the expectation that they were to make contributions to discussion when topics were raised. Over a three week period, when discussion topics were due for wider exposure, a 10 minute segment in each class was recorded on audiocassette. The teacher had selected the module for discussion from their class materials, personal stories of adjusting to study in an English speaking environment.

Number of recorded sessions

Six audiotape recordings were made over three weeks. Segments of talk from each of the two classes provided sufficient corpus for analysis, capturing talk on a range of discussion topics. Students understood that they were to be participating in class as usual in a natural way and to ignore the audio recorder and researcher–observer. They provided permission indicating their willingness to participate in the recorded sessions.

Quasi-experimental action

For a 10 minute period in the discussion stage of the session, an audiorecording was made of the teacher and students responding to the set topic. In whole class interactions the teacher aimed to open up and maintain discussion in a natural way based on an opening topic question, such as "What were some of the stresses that Caroline faced?". Questions were posed and alternatives to questions offered by the teacher through the discussion period. For example, following a student statement, rather than closing the talk, the teacher rephrased the statement and paused, thereby encouraging a student to retain her turn.

In this example M2 is a student, T is the teacher and ++ indicates a pause:

> M2: *I said it's better for her to staying at home and do something++ instead of her studying++.*
>
> T: *So her family expected her to be a home person.*

In this case, the teacher provided a reflective statement as an alternative to another question.

The teacher chose from the six alternatives to questioning as the choice of response at third turns in teaching exchanges and as prompts through the interactions (Dillon, 1994, pp. 77-85).

Analysis

Language data were dealt with in the following way:

1. Transcriptions were made; teacher and student moves were identified.
2. Teacher's evaluative/follow-up moves were noted as a stimulus to student talk.
3. Questions and statement types were marked on the transcriptions.
4. Transcribed text was analysed for student responses following a teacher's initiation.
5. The numbers of words uttered by students (both content and function words) in response to a teacher's question or statement were noted and tallied.
6. Comparison was made of student responses following teacher utterance types.

Transcription code

The following samples of talk indicate interactions for groups A and B, where from the transcription of the lesson the following symbols are used:

T= teacher

Students are indicated by the letter of their name: H= Hussein (student), M, M1, M2, M3= male students; F= Female

+++ = pause (additional '+' indicates longer pause); +(*5*) indicates a 5 seconds pause

/word/ = word is unclear and an estimate of spoken word is made

A: [there is no

B: [noticeable pause as B takes over the turn from A – either completing A's statement or beginning a new utterance.

Results

Predominantly open negotiation types of questions were employed by the teacher. These had the effect of starting discussion when students did not initiate questions themselves. Open questions were expected in situations where the teacher was prompting personal views and did not have prior knowledge of the content of the students' talk. Display questions were minor occurrences in the data and usually had question tags attached, such as "That's what you said, isn't it?" On occasions, statements with question tags such as "You don't like that, do you?" were treated as rhetorical questions, and therefore as not requiring a student answer. They were 'heard' as confirming responses and classified as declarative statements.

The transcriptions showed teacher and student talk in English, with false starts and fillers, content questions, students' answers, students' initiations, interruptions and extended talk, with samples of discussion in written form available for closer analysis. The teacher's follow-up moves which demonstrated one of the six response types at the teacher's move were identified as demonstrating an influence on the choice of students' moves and the indicated length of their talk in the discussion mode.

General notice was taken of the meaningful content of the students' talk. Word count of students' utterances demonstrated a difference between responses to teacher questions and to the other five types of prompts that the teacher provided during discussion. Each type of response was analysed on a pie chart and some explanations offered as to the findings.

Both question-asking by the teacher and alternatives to questioning yielded language production by students. Samples of the teacher initiation are provided from across the sample of transcriptions. When questions were asked, student responses tended to be short and undeveloped. Often the question had to be posed more than once.

Effects of 'questions' on discussion

Sample (from transcription A1):

117: T: ***Would anyone else like to add to that? How did you find the story? ++***

118: M: …*the story*

120: F: ***encouraging***

The teacher posed questions often in the form of a tentative construction, using an auxiliary verb in the conditional form "would" to soften the request. In English, this structural form is preferred as it is thought to reduce the face threatening act of asking a direct question. Teachers use polite request forms when asking students questions, expecting them to provide an answer or proffer a view.

Secondly, questions were not to be taken literally on all occasions. Students had to process the question and interpret the proposition as one requiring a pragmatic understanding of the questions as in the sample given. The teacher is allowing the whole class to participate by asking for "anyone else", which implies that all people are invited to speak by adding to what the last speaker said; the last speaker would feel inclined not to be the one to add more on hearing that statement. The proposition is not to be taken necessarily at face value; "to add to that" can be explained as increasing the content of what has already been said, or it can mean to provide some other substantial content. Likewise the second question is not to be interpreted at a literal level. What is implied is a reaction to the story that they have heard and read together.

Taking this example of a typical classroom question, a considerable level of interpretation or familiarity with English is required simply to determine the question. Then there is processing time to determine what and how to answer the teacher's questions in terms of the discussion theme. Simply put, questions pose difficulties of interpretation compared with alternatives to questions.

Sample (from transcription B1)
63: T: **Do you think she was a critical thinker?**
64: H: *Yes.+++(5)*

When display questions were posed by the teacher, minimal responses were likely. Students produced minimal answers with hesitant or little follow up. In this sample following the minimal response "Yes" by student H, the teacher proceeded to elaborate and develop a long turn, so discussion by students was foiled (Dillon, 1993).

Effect of 'reflective statements' on discussion

Sample (from transcription A1):
92: T: ***You would describe her as that sort of person***
93: M: *I would describe her as ah challenging*.

A reflective statement of a student comment was one in which the teacher stated her understanding of what the student had just said, giving her sense of it in an economical one sentence reflection. Reflection took the form of repetition or summary, characterising the student's utterance. Often the teacher would start the utterance with "So you're saying that…" and not change the intention of the speaker but make a reflective restatement. Through the rewording of a student's statement in that way, the overall effect of clarification engaged the student in discussion and appeared to reduce the confrontational effects of a question. In that sample of talk, student M extended the expression of his view as a result of the teacher's reflective statement.

Sample (from transcription B1)
15: T: ***So her family expected her to be a home person***
16: M3: And they maybe think that she is, doesn't ah finish the program first+++ Maybe they criticise her.

Reflecting on the discussion theme and reformulating a previous comment, the teacher engaged students and allowed them to expand the expression of their ideas. Less imposing than a question, the teacher's reflective statement immediately signalled to students that the previous student turn was valued, considered worthy of personal reflection and maintained in the discussion for others to talk about. Students generally are used to the typical third turn by teachers, acknowledging the accuracy of a student response and then posing the next question, often with little reflection on the explicit or implied meaning of the student's previous response. So with an occasion to have another opportunity to talk following the teacher's endorsement of the previous response, students were likely to continue, providing even further endorsement of the student's view in discussion.

Effect of 'declarative statement' on discussion

Sample (from transcription A2)
1: T: ….***you were asked to prepare your thoughts++ on whether you think there is a link between food and culture, and how important it is in your society+ in your home country++….***
(intervening student talk…laughter)
5: M1: *I think there is a strong link between the food and culture.+++ Ummm back home ah+++ah++ I said that because back home++there is a strong++*
6: M2: */connect/*
7: M1: *strong ++ah++ link between food and culture*
8: Students (laughing)
9: M1: *Um+ culture for us is being in the desert ++ and ++ um people + usually they have their customs and + and ah ah the reasons and they are /often/ being generous*
10: M1: *When someone visits the other one they has to slaughter lamb, and make a big dish of rice and lamb.*
11: M1: *and they eat from the dish. So ah they [they*
12: M2*:* *[eat by hand*

In a declarative statement the teacher stated her 'pre-question' thought that came to mind as a result of what the student was saying. It is the thought which would trigger a follow-up question if the teacher were to ask the next question. It might not necessarily be the opposite of what was stated; it could be complementary to it, or simply informative of her thoughts, somewhat like the answer that she would have given herself in response to her next question. The student speaker in such situations of hearing the teacher's declarative statement has the benefit of her thoughts on the matter. In the sample given, the student repeats the teacher's main idea, holding the turn as he formulates the content of his worldview in lines 9, 10 and 11.

Effect of 'speaker referral' on discussion

Sample (from transcription B2):
113:T: ***Similar to what Tai was saying according to what was grown in that***

area
114: M: *but that's a few years ago*
117: M2: *that was when family ate together and were sitting together*

The teacher stated a relationship between a current student's statement and a previous speaker's, referring one to another. Then the two students could examine their contributions for any relation that they might have found and go on to discuss them. There was potential for students to discuss further and from their viewpoints the proposition made earlier.

Effect of 'statement of mind' on discussion

Sample (from transcription A3)
113: T: ***Some people do find prayer helpful. Um***
114: F: If it works

Having heard a student statement, the teacher described what came into her mind in relation to what the student had been saying. The student got to speak and respond to the teacher's true state of mind, allowing discussion to develop. There is potential for this alternative to yield higher language production from students yet the student has to interpret the teacher's perspective when her ideas might be quite far from the student's realisation of them.

Effect of 'statement of interest' on discussion

Sample (from transcription A1)
73: T: ***Tell me more about why you think that.***
74: M: Ah++ because of the environment that she lived in +++is ah + I'm mean simple ah for what she was living in and it was a lot of pressure.

The teacher stated an interest in hearing further about what the student had been saying. She showed a direct interest in the student's expressed view, or she wanted a definition or example, so interest was reflected in the statement that she made to the student. Recognition of a viewpoint being well received by the teacher had a motivating effect on the student's engagement with discussion and it was evident as the student expanded his previous concept.

Effect of 'back-channel signal' on discussion

Sample (from transcription B2)
89: M7: …because we start the meal we have to mention the name of god.++ Ah we mention the name of god before we start.
90: T: ***A + yes + mmh mmh***
91: M7: and ummh ++ we eat by + a right hand. We use our right hand ++ +

When the teacher listened to students in discussion format, she provided verbal and non-verbal signals indicating that a speaker was being encouraged to continue. Non-verbal signals included a nod of the head, making eye contact or a hand gesture. She acknowledged what was said by means of verbal signals, a pause or fillers such as "eh uhm" while looking intently at the speaker, showing that she had no intention of interrupting. Pauses and attentive silences created a feeling of obligation in students to offer more language input to discussions. Back-channel signals indicated that the

student speaking could keep the turn and not be interrupted by the teacher although another student might have joined the discussion. The signals also indicated to students that they were on track. Given such assurance as in line 13 in this sample, student M expanded his views and provided a contrast in the discussion:

Sample (from transcription B1)

12: M: Yeah, I think they're her family++

13: T: *Mmm*

14: M2: They said it's better for her staying at home and do something++ instead of her studying.

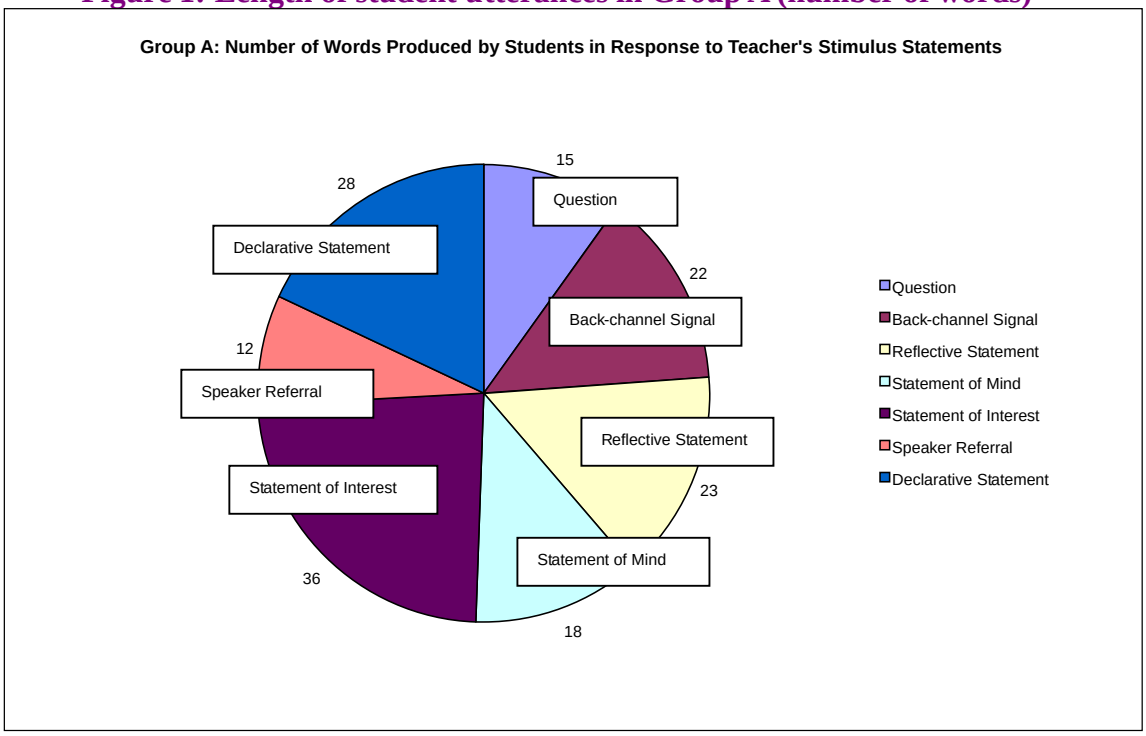
Back-channel signals were used throughout the recorded segments of talk in discussion.

English language production

Production of language and length of student turn were higher in the alternatives than in responses to direct questions, even of the open kind. Taken overall, on average students produced 15 words following a teacher's question. By contrast, utterances were longest from a teacher's statement of interest in the students' ideas in the discussion (36 words average). More questions were asked by the teacher than alternative forms of communication with students but those questions yielded less opportunity for students to talk, 10% on average (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1 shows the quantity of English language production by students in Group A expressed as number of words in response to seven types of teacher verbal initiations. Statement of interest provided the alternative most likely to receive extended talk by students, followed by declarative statements, reflective statements, back-channel signals and statement of mind. The alternative of referring to another student yielded the lowest count of number of utterances on this occasion, similar to the length of utterances from the teacher's questioning.

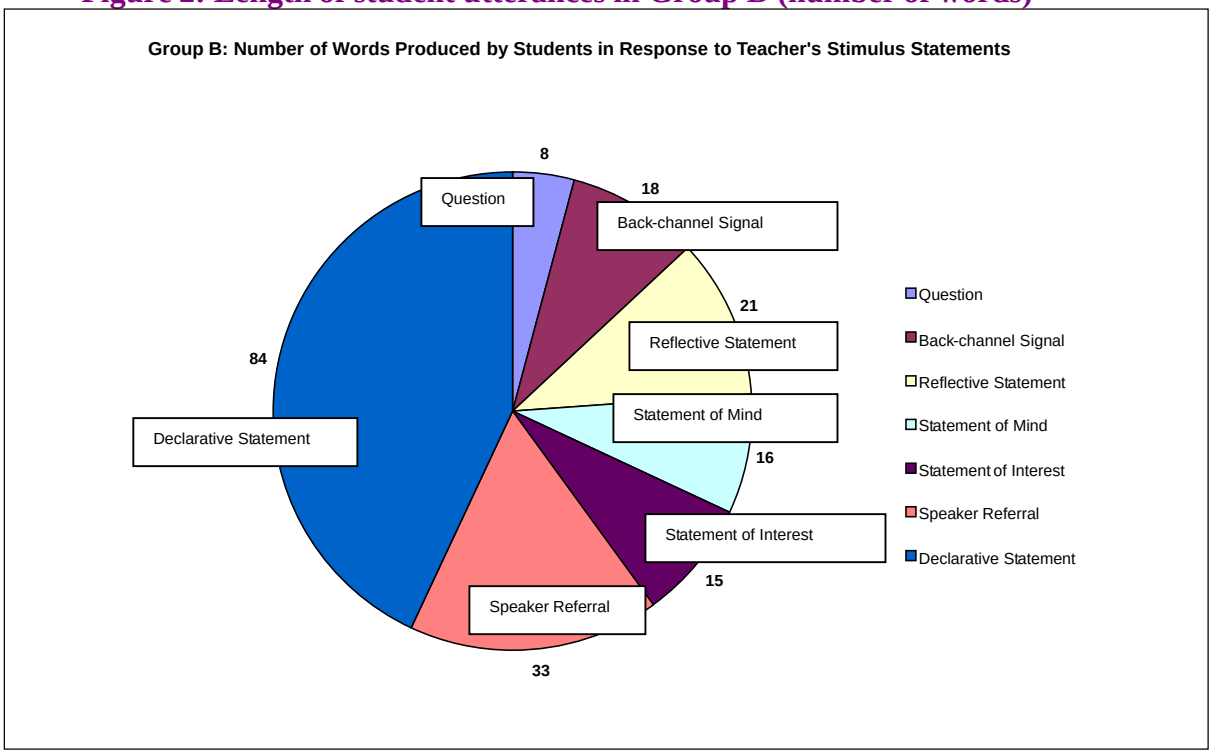
Figure 1: Length of student utterances in Group A (number of words)



The teacher's questioning yielded the fewest utterances by students in Group B, repeating the pattern which emerged among Group A students. Figure 2 shows the quantity of English language produced by students, expressed as number of words uttered in response to teacher verbal initiations. Intelligible utterances following a teacher's question averaged 8 words among Group B students. Although more questions were asked by the teacher than any other single alternative to a question, those questions yield less opportunity for students to talk, only 4% on average of student talk in the data.

By contrast, students' utterances were longer when they followed any of the six alternative types of initiating statements made by the teacher. Declarative statements made by the teacher yielded the longest responses by students, on average 84 words a response. On speaker referral statements by the teacher, students averaged 33 words in their responses and on reflective statements 21 words per response in discussion.

Figure 2: Length of student utterances in Group B (number of words)



Discussion

Classroom communication exchanges between text and learner, teacher and students, and students and students provided the learning context for discussion in tutorials. Teacher talk and talk generated by turns within the classroom discourse (Dillon, 1988, 1994; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Edwards & Westgate, 1994) had an impact on the learning context and tended to foster discussion when the teacher was conscious of the roles of questioning and alternatives to questioning.

Alternatives to questions provided opportunity for more language to be produced by students than direct questions. Although direct questions engaged students, the question often had to be repeated to gain an answer. When a response came, it was a

brief answer without a clear development of the idea held in the question. It appeared that students were trying to second guess the teacher and provide a short, accurate answer as a summary or non-elaborated point when the teacher posed a question.

Whereas questions tended to yield short answers, alternatives to questions more often produced longer responses which were picked up by other students and elaborated upon, extended and exemplified. The IRF pattern of interaction did not preclude collaborative interaction between teacher and students. Students could build on one another's contributions, as Wells (1999, p. 209) has also shown, "in a manner that advances the collective understanding of the topic under discussion". They brought into view elements from their cultural heritage that were not anticipated or produced when direct questions were posed at the third turn.

From an observer's perspective, the UNIPREP students were likened to the metaphor of a small convoy of boats at sea taking on board equipment that would hold them in good stead by way of watertight hulls. As little boats they were bobbing on the sea, having to get into the next port and to stock up with new enhancements that should help provide 'clear sailing' for the more difficult next part of their journey. As students they had to acquire tools that attuned them to the "cultural logic" (Baker & Freebody, 1989) of the pervading teaching practice in an academic English tutorial. They had to perform student roles within parameters that their teacher encouraged or allowed them to act out (McCarthy & O'Keeffe, 2004) while they could be seen also to conform to the quite narrow range of behaviour that their peers accepted in discussion.

Cultural influences on discussion in the diverse international group of students

The focus of this study was the teacher's role in fostering discussion. However, there were some issues related to cultural expectations among the group of student participants that should be acknowledged in interpreting the data. There were 40 students in the study, 30 men and 10 women; 70% were 25 years of age or younger. Over 50% (23 men) were from China or countries in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Libya). Among the women, up to three in each class were Chinese; all other nationalities were represented by only one woman. Other countries represented included Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, India, Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Ghana, the Republic of Korea and South Africa. Unless they were explicitly invited by the teacher to join the discussion, women contributed fewer turns of talk than men and fewer than might have been expected in an all-female class.

Roles of female and male students in discussion

Women in this study were from paternalistic cultures and many were less inclined to initiate talk in English or to speak out in mixed multicultural company. Further assumptions are tentatively made that hierarchies of age and status predisposed female participants to *turn taking* rather than *initiating* a turn or *interrupting* others in conversation. Also they came from traditions in which reading and writing were academic pursuits more highly valued than the spoken word. They may also have been inclined to hold beliefs that the teacher should control discussion. They may have been acting out those beliefs, so they were hesitant and tended to wait for an invitation to contribute to the discussion (Barron, 2002; Chan, 2004; Christy, 2005;

Huang, 2005).

For a section of the male cohort, having women in the class was a new experience. Men and women in their home countries were educated in separate institutions. This background experience may have caused them to be less inclined to acknowledge contributions from their female classmates or to hear them. Cultural background may have contributed to their dismissing the female viewpoint in the whole discussion. Furthermore, the men, particularly those from the Middle East, appeared more confident than the women in speaking English.

As students with background languages other than English, they were using English in developing an understanding of cultural adjustment to an Australian university tutorial setting. At the same time, they were actually finding out what their own culture represented. That was a challenge which hitherto had not been properly noticed. Those who were culturally aware recognised that they were experiencing a process of finding a "third place" (LoBianco & Crozet, 2003). A third place is the space where users of a language learn to manage personal reaction to content identified as typical of the target culture. As they learn that they can be comfortably part of two cultures, they identify with behaviours common to both and manage those that are distinct. They begin to recognise that they no longer so clearly belong to one culture in all ways but have a third place to identify with.

Students had a need to talk as a reflection of their readings and personal experiences of change between home and that of the new university environment. Their teachers could foster discussion in the academic context. A common way of explaining the metaphor of change was through changes in life described in personal stories. Images were built as a means of sharing that experience and for raising awareness of ways to comprehend and manage change.

Conclusion

By choosing alternatives to asking another question at the third turn, the teacher encouraged students to maintain dialogue (substantive dialogue) among themselves and with the teacher, and to engage in higher order thinking (deep knowledge) as they broadened the base of their understanding of cultural behaviour. They could also show interest in a colleague's views (connectedness) and contrast personal familiar cultural behaviour (recognition of difference) (Education Queensland, 2002).

There had been an expectation among students from particular educational systems that the teacher was to provide all information in the classroom. The student's role was therefore to listen. In order to elicit discussion responses more in keeping with the requirements for Australian university tutorial exchange, a climate of encouragement to speak had to be developed. Attempting the exercise in the 4th and 5th week of the intensive UNIPREP program led the teacher to find alternatives to questioning to foster discussion. Statements of interest and reflection, referrals to previous speakers and the use of non-verbal support were made meaningful as students came to acknowledge a role in their own learning from contributions that their colleagues made to the discussions.

This study has brought a discourse analysis focus to whole class discussion between teacher and international UNIPREP students in tutorial sessions in the higher education sector. It has provided a context for second language acquisition researchers, TESOL trainers and teachers and shown potential as another site for imagining ESL Study Strategies pedagogy.

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