2 Communicative Interaction in the Foreign Language Classroom

2.1 Introduction

Language use in the foreign language classroom is ritually constrained: students are expected to mimic what the teacher says, roles are ratified,[1] and violations of the expected order of the interaction is usually sanctioned in one way or another.[2] A central issue we discuss is the following: how can we expect the learner to strive for an 'authentic' and everyday life-like use of the English language in a space in which language use is everything but everyday life-like?

It must be made clear from the start that, given the large number of variables at work in different classrooms – some of which we shall point out – there is no one 'method' which leads to learning 'success', and possible procedures for using the materials we wish to detail will be necessarily conditioned by the nature of the class the teacher is working with, the syllabus he is following, the textbook he is obliged to use, and so on. We give no recipes for success for the simple reason that such recipes do not exist. This said, it will be clear that the authors have opinions as to the relative value of different teaching procedures. These opinions will be argued, however, and presented without dogmatism. While the notion of infallible teaching recipes is illusionary, the concept of scientific neutrality is probably equally so. Ultimately, the present grammar aims to provide an essentially pragmatics- and interaction ritual-based view of the foreign language classroom, and so our objective is to raise awareness of the pragmatic complexity of the unachievable and unrealistic goal of learning how to sound life-like in a non-life-like setting.

2.2 Target versus Pedagogic Discourse

The type of English spoken in the classroom is clearly a major factor determining the type of English that is learnt there. The general thesis we want to propose here is that there is a tension in the foreign language classroom between using English which is appropriate to the *classroom*, and using English which is appropriate to the teaching *goals* – i.e. in the process of teaching English, we teach English of a particular kind, which we may call *pedagogic discourse.* This has

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perhaps led in the past to the complaint that, while our learners are 'successful' in the classroom, and can do all that we as teachers demand of them there, when they try to use the skills we have taught them *outside* the classroom, they are less 'successful'.[3] No 'transfer' of learning has taken place. We are suggesting here that no 'transfer' of learning is actually possible, as often what is *learnt* and what is *needed* for non-classroom talk are two different things. In fact, if 'transfer' *is* effected, it often leads to 'error' – such errors we may term 'teaching-induced'.[4] The paradox here is that the learner makes a mistake in talking English precisely because he has successfully learnt how to speak English in the ritual space of the classroom. In a nutshell, there is a difference here between *pedagogic* and *target* discourse. While a grammar of the present scope cannot resolve this paradox, it can help at least to systematically reflect on it.

One obvious reflection of this difference is the common observation that question–answer sequences between teacher and learner often have some unusual features, one being that more often than not the teacher 'knows' the answer before he asks the question, and in fact the learner often 'answers' the question *with* a question:[5]

(1)

Teacher: What is the capital of England?
Learner: Is it London?
Teacher: Yes, that's right.

This is a typically routinised ritual interaction, lacking the free flow of interaction outside of the space of the classroom. More specifically, the learner is obliged to answer, and so is the teacher to confirm that the learner is right, which is a typical conventionalised classroom ritual. Even if such learner 'answers' are not given in the form of a 'question' (i.e. no interrogative sentence is used), a question intonation is often present, meaning something like "I'm not so sure if what I'm saying (or the way I'm saying it) is what you want, so please tell me if I'm right or not."[6] An instance of teacher-induced 'error' would then be the case in which this intonation pattern is 'transferred' to non-pedagogic settings and used in everyday talk in English. It seems in fact clear that this happens even with advanced learners.

The peculiar nature of 'teacher-questions' is well known and will be considered again below. For another simplistic illustration of possible differences between pedagogic and target discourse, consider now the following short interactional sequence:

(2)

Teacher: Can you swim well?
Learner: Yes, I can.
Teacher: Do you like potatoes?
Learner: Yes, I do.

Here we have a sequence of two 'question–answer' sequences. Even if we disregard a possible purpose the teacher might have had in initiating these two sequences (practising short-form answers, use of periphrastic "Do", or whatever), it is in fact not easy to contextualise sequences like this in a non-pedagogic setting. In other words, they typically represent ritual interaction in a classroom, with specific rights and obligations, the related expectation for a preset interactional dynamic, and so on. This issue becomes visible as soon as one adds a minimal sense of context to this interaction, by providing various responses to the above questions. As an example, consider the first 'question', and the following possible 'answers':

(3)

A: Can you swim well?

B:

(a) Oh I'll be allright - don't worry

(b) Of course what do you mean can I swim well

(c) Yes

(d) Okay - I'll do it

(e) Hmm quite well - I did a lot of swimming at school actually

If A is heard as expressing anxiety, B might seek to reassure (response a). If A is heard as challenging B's competence, B might refute the implication that he cannot swim well (response b). If B cannot see the point of A's 'question', he assumes A is leading up to something else, and via intonation asks what this is (response c). If A is heard as making a request (he might for example be looking for someone to play in a waterpolo team, or somebody to retrieve his plastic duck floating out to sea), B may agree to the request (response d). If A is heard as making a 'genuine' request for information as to how well B can swim (e.g. in the context of an interview for a job as a beach attendant in a summer camp), B is likely to downplay his affirmative response (to avoid bragging), but also to provide supportive evidence (response e). As this list shows, in our daily lives there are many situations in which rights and obligations are clearly different from that of the classroom, and as soon as we find ourselves in such situations, A's question itself changes its implied meaning.

In all these five cases, a response of the form 'Yes, I can' (unless suitably modified by intonation and other prosodic features) is unlikely to be appropriate. Further, we find it difficult to imagine contexts in which the teacher–learner exchanges given in (2) above could actually occur. We have here then a case in which the English language is being used for pedagogic purposes, but what results is a classroom-specific type of discourse. The danger is that, in

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teaching English, one is teaching something other than the English one in fact wishes to teach![7]

The dilemma posed above by the distinction between pedagogic and target discourse can be overcome in several ways:

(1) We change our use of English in the classroom such that it better approximates to the English we aim to teach – this is possible to a certain extent. However, clearly the teacher cannot simply avoid his ratified responsibility for teaching!

(2) We draw our learners' attention to the differences such that they at least know about them – for example, it seems a reasonable procedure especially with older learners to point out before a particular exercise why it is being suggested, and what type of English is being used in the exercise. While such an explicit cognitive treatment seems certainly desirable (and ethical), it clearly leads only to talking about talk – that is, a type of metapragmatic exercise involving learning.[8]

(3) We accept the differences insofar as 1 and 2 above are (at best) only partial solutions, but seek ways and means of including samples of target discourse inside pedagogic discourse. This is, of course, what teachers have always done via the use of texts, for example. But we are here considering spoken interaction, rather than written discourse. We can, of course, play films or video-recordings in which native speakers are conversing. This may be useful but:

(a) All too often, in fact, the prepared recording is especially prepared to be used in teaching and it shows! More seriously:

(b) Such materials only help receptive skills, particularly, 'oral comprehension', and moreover the comprehension required is not that of a conversationalist, as the listener (the learner) has no interactional role: he cannot interrupt the recording to ask the speaker to repeat something, for example. He is a passive overhearer, not an active participant. Here we need to remind ourselves again that classroom learning provides a very different ritual setting from that of interaction in ordinary life, and very often it is impossible for the learner to take an active participation role in the interaction the learner examines.[9]

In sum, we are suggesting the following:

(1) In the interests of exposing the learner to target language, the teacher should attempt to reflect such language in his own pedagogic behaviour.

(2) It is potentially valuable to make explicit to the learner what he is learning, and how what he is learning relates to everyday interactional behaviour.

(3) Target discourse may be practised inside the pedagogic framework, most commonly via simulation, games, role-playing, drama and so on.

We now turn to some concrete illustrations of these points.

2.3 Bridging the Gap

Consider the following pedagogic exchange:

(4)

Teacher: Peter, ask me what time it is
Peter: What time is it
Teacher: Good

Clearly, Peter cannot be said to have asked the teacher what time it is: he has simply said "What time is it". Consider then the following:

(5)

Teacher: Peter, ask Mary what time it is
Peter: What time is it Mary
Mary: It's half past twelve
Teacher: Good

Here we might wish to say that Peter has indeed asked Mary the time, a major reason for saying so being that Mary responds to what he says as though he had. However, we still have no idea why he might behave like this. Consider then the following:

(6)

Teacher: Peter, imagine you are looking forward to the end of this lesson and are wondering how much longer it's going to last Lean over to Mary and ask her what time it is.
Peter: What time is it Mary
Mary: It's half past twelve
Teacher: Good

Now we have some degree of contextualisation[10] but, in giving a context, we have made the interactional behaviour (particularly that of Peter) somewhat artificial. Basically, the teacher outlines the changing rights and obligations holding for a situation when the ritual situation of a lesson is going to end. Let's therefore try again:

(7)

Teacher: (as in (6) above)
Peter: Hey Mary
Mary: What
Peter: What time is it
Mary: Half past twelve
Peter: { Is that all / Oh good }
Teacher: Good

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Note that not much more is said in version (7) than in version (6), but that there is much more interaction. We might then go on to consider the teacher's behaviour in the above sequence, and seek to make this rather more in line with non-pedagogic interactional norms:

(8)

Teacher:	Peter
Peter:	Yeah
Teacher:	I imagine you're looking forward to the end of this lesson aren't you
Peter:	Well er to tell the truth yes
Teacher:	I thought so imagine will you that your watch has stopped and you're wondering how much longer this lesson is going to last Lean over to Mary there and ask her what time it is okay
Peter:	Okay - hey Mary
Mary:	What
Peter:	What time is it Mary
Mary:	It's half past twelve
Teacher:	Thanks that was fine

What have we changed here? Well, the teacher first of all checked on Peter's attention instead of assuming it. Secondly, he tried to link the imaginary situation with Peter's 'real' situation (in fact, Peter may not have been looking forward to the end of the lesson at all: given the nature of schools, however, he is practically obliged by social pressures to say "yes" in front of his peer group!).[11] Thirdly, the expression "will you" inserted in the request implicitly seeks the connivance of Peter instead of assuming it, as does the "okay" at the end of the request. Finally, the teacher's closing acknowledgement contains the speech act Thank, normative after a Request is carried out unless one assumes by social right that the Request has to be carried out, and the evaluation ("good") is changed to an appreciation ("That was fine").

While there is nothing particularly 'new' or 'exciting' about the interaction in (8) above, as an example of teaching methodology, the language used and the way it is used differ significantly from what we started with in (4) above. The differences are slight, but cumulatively highly significant, if we are concerned with approximating target interactional behaviour in the classroom. Note the following:

(1) In examples (5)–(8), Peter's utterance is not directly addressed to the teacher: compare (5) above with the following:

(9)

Teacher:	Peter ask me what time it is
Peter:	What time is it
Teacher:	It's half past twelve - good

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This is less convincing than (5) as the teacher is acting both as 'pedagogue' and as 'conversationalist'. Peter (and the rest of the class) might well be confused as to what exactly is going on.

(2) We tried to contextualise Peter's utterance and bring about a sequentially relevant response by linking the critical utterances with a situational setting.

(3) The contextualisation may be minimal (as in 5) or more elaborate (as in 6), and may approximate to a greater or lesser degree to the actual situation the learner finds himself in (cf. 5 with "Imagine you are Robinson Crusoe and have just met Man Friday. You decide to ask him the time").

(4) As soon as we provide a context, we need to make sure that the language we wish to use in fact fits that context. For we should note that a procedure whereby one starts with a linguistic expression (item to be taught) and then searches for an 'appropriate' context is a totally unnatural one. Speakers do not go around with specific, pre-packaged language items stored in their heads waiting to find a context in which they might use them – they find themselves in a context and choose elements of language they find appropriate!

(5) Many of the inserted items in the developmental stages of the dialogue have non-linguistic and/or non-verbal substitutes – the attention-getting "Peter" or "Hey Mary" are appropriately responded to by eye-contact or some grunt of acknowledgement, for example: Peter's reaction to Mary's telling him the time could be signalled via a groan, or a smile.

(6) We have paid some attention to the language used by the teacher in his 'pedagogic' talk framing the conversation between Peter and Mary, as well as to the learner-utterances making up the latter. This issue is not central to our concern in this chapter. We here make the point again with concrete illustration, however, to reinforce the argument developed in Section 2.2 above. There is a difference then between target discourse and pedagogic discourse, but the latter may be embedded in the former. 'How?' is the next question. Given that (8) above is possibly more like a 'natural' conversation than (4), how can the teacher bring dialogues such as (8) into being, in preference to the type of pedagogic exercise exemplified in (4)? The next section will answer this question.

2.4 Playing Games and Playing Roles

If we seek to distinguish simply between role-play, games-play and other more formal and traditional classroom activities, we shall not find this an easy task. We shall therefore attempt only commonsense definitions of

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the terms 'role-play' and 'games-play' in the context of foreign language teaching, and in the light of the attitudes promulgated in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 above.[12] Role-play occurs whenever two or more persons behave, conversationally and otherwise, in ways they would not have done had the teacher not suggested they do so, and when additionally some feature or features of the behaviour do not match the situation, personality or identity of those persons as these are generally perceived by those persons themselves, or by others witnessing this behaviour. Role-play is a typical liminal ritual, as Victor Turner puts it:[13] it temporarily brings the participants into an alternative world where their normal rights and obligations and the norms of expected behaviour become different from that of their ordinary life, and the participants interact just like actors on a stage. A game is involved when the behaviour is goal-oriented, the goal is an 'artificial' one ('points' for example, or simply 'winning'), the behaviour is explicitly rule governed, and neither the behaviour, the goal nor the rules might reasonably be expected to arise in the everyday business of living. Again, here the participants find themselves in a liminal ritual in which *everything* is different from the ordinary business of living. (Note incidentally that this loose definition of game-playing fits practically all pedagogic discourse, unless we assume that certain forms of classroom behaviour are part of 'the everyday business of living').

In this section, we are interested solely in procedures and activities that a teacher can adopt or encourage in his foreign language teaching as a means of bridging the gap between target and pedagogic discourse. Thus, certain language games and role-play procedures might well have other justifications and purposes, which are both warranted and effective, but still be less than optimal from the perspective we are adopting. A spelling test conducted through the *Sesame Street* type of television programmes might, for example, be used as a stimulating alternative to some other test format and be a totally worthwhile lesson activity.[14] However, the teacher doing so would scarcely wish to claim that in using this 'games' format for his spelling test he was exposing the learners to, and giving them practice in, the use of everyday conversational English.

A further note of caution needs to be sounded, given the specific perspective we are interested in. Many games more adequately reflect pedagogic than target discourse, in that one person organises the game and knows the 'winning' answer, and the game in essence consists of the players trying to discover that answer under various constraints imposed by the rules of the game. The discourse appropriate to the game therefore precisely matches that of the classroom exchange in that it is constrained by ritual rights and obligations.[15] This may conceivably make teachers feel more confident with

such materials because it gives them a ritually ratified control over the flow of events, and the related learning procedure, without this control being declared as that of a teacher. We do not wish to claim that such games have no place in foreign language teaching and learning activities, but to assume that any game is a 'natural' way to practise asking 'questions' is to make a false assumption.

Before we give some overview of different types of role-play activities that may be conducted, we may offer some general remarks on the content or subject matter of such interactional work. To a large extent, this is of course determined by the situation brought into being for or through the role-play itself, and critical factors concerning the situation are the roles of the participants, their interactional purposes, and the place where the role-play occurs. It is obvious, for example, that if we have patient–doctor roles and a consulting-room as a setting, this situation limits possible topics of talk because the participants will automatically project the ritual and related institutional constraints of the imagined situation into the world of the classroom.[16] We shall use the more global term 'contextualisation' in discussing the selection of topics of talks, therefore. The following is one possible way of categorising different types of context one might use in establishing role-play situations in foreign language teaching.[17]

(1) The learner is given a role identical to, or at least compatible with, his 'real' role as a foreign learner of English, and is put into a situation he might find himself in an English-speaking country, if visiting that country for study, family exchange or general holiday purposes. Thus, we might have our learner buying some sweets, going through customs at Dover, ordering meals in a restaurant, booking into a campsite, and so on. By engaging in role-plays designed in such a way, the teacher achieves keeping the learner within his natural conventions and rights and obligations – that is, there is only minimal change in the ritual flow of events. In this type of contextualisation, much valuable area studies information can be transmitted also, and cultural artefacts from the English native-speaking land can add verisimilitude to the role-play. Note, however, that only one learner can play himself: somebody has to take the part of the sweetshop assistant, the customs officer, the waiter, and so on.

(2) Alternatively, we might seek situations in which – again – the learners' roles are compatible with their own status, but they are now put into a situation in their own country: the English speakers are the 'foreigners', as exchange students, visitors staying in the family, tourists, and so on. Note here that the 'foreigner' need not be an English native-speaker, but simply a non-speaker of the local language. Further, the learner may adopt an informal interpreter role, as

intermediary between, for example, a local policeman and an English-speaking tourist.

(3) Following this, we may seek a more 'neutral' setting – of a youth hostel in Sweden, for example – where the learner plays himself once more using English in its international role as a lingua franca to communicate with persons for whom English is also a non-native language.[18]

(4) Adopting a very different approach, which may result in a practically unrestricted range of situations and contexts, we may relax our attempts to be 'realistic' concerning the role of the learner in a role-play, and consciously seek out roles which have an inherent interest, attraction, pedagogic or novelty value, as likely to stimulate enjoyment and to afford ample practice of the type of interaction in which we wish to indulge. Experience suggests that some learners find it difficult or uncongenial to enact themselves. One reason may be that in enacting himself, the learner is vulnerable to inhibitions and insecurity carried over from his 'real' role as a learner, while if the role he is playing is clearly 'artificial', this is less likely to occur. For example, the hypothetical instruction we gave some pages back, "Imagine you are Robinson Crusoe, and have just met Man Friday. You decide to ask him the time", is of potential pedagogic effectiveness precisely because the learner is clearly not expected to take the role 'seriously'.

The four broad types of contextualisation above clearly allow of much more detailed subdivisions. They are important, however, as revealing different approaches to the content or subject matter of an interaction. We suggest that all four types of contextualisation are relevant, and it is only on grounds of dogma or personal prejudice that a teacher will concern himself exclusively with the one or the other.

We turn now to look at some other variables the teacher may control for different pedagogic purposes in introducing games or role-play activities. Some overlap with the issue of contextualisation is inevitable here. Consider, however, the following variables.

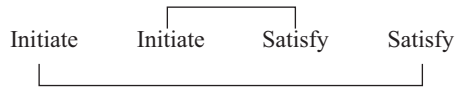
2.5 Some Controllable Variables

(1) The first variable is the structure of the interaction. This variable is developed more fully later in this book. The simple notion is that by developing a means of structurally describing spoken interaction we are in a position to control the structure of dialogic material used in role-play, games and other exercises, i.e. use this variable systematically in developing teaching materials. Later in this book, specific suggestions regarding progression are put forward,

whereby a dialogue of highly simple structure may be made progressively more complex. Such structures can, of course, be made explicit (see more below). Consider the following simple example:

> Imagine the sort of parent who never immediately agrees to her child's request, but always makes that agreement conditional on some other achievement. The sort of dialogue that occurs is
>
> Child: Can I watch television now
>
> Parent: Have you finished your homework
>
> Child: Yes of course I have
>
> Parent: Well, allright then
>
> Child: Can you read me a story
>
> Parent: Have you cleaned your teeth
>
> Child: Yes, of course I have
>
> Parent: Well, allright then
>
> Make up and practise such dialogues in pairs.

The interactional structure here, as we will explain later in this book, is held constant and consists of the following sequences of moves:



Here the embedded exchange is a Pre-Responding one. The same structure can then be practised in mini-situations of the following kind:

> Mrs X and Mrs Y are neighbours. Mrs X is constantly borrowing things off Mrs Y, who always agrees, but not immediately:
>
> Mrs X: Oh Mrs Y can you lend me a pound of sugar
>
> Mrs Y: Hm what do you want it for
>
> Mrs X: Well - you see I'm right in the middle of baking a cake
>
> Mrs Y: Hmm - well all right then

In sequencing such items, one procedure would be to vary the interactional structure but to keep the content more or less the same:

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(a) A: Can I watch television now - I've finished my homework

B: Well allright then

(b) A: Can I watch television now - I've done my homework

B: Are you quite sure you have

A: Yes of course I have

B: Well allright then

(2) A second variable is the social role relationship between the role-players. We have made reference to this variable already in discussing content and contextualisation (see also Chapter 8). We noted that in some situations it will be impossible to keep both roles consistent with that of a foreign learner of English – in a simple buying transaction, for example, somebody has to play the part of the shopkeeper. This will in itself lead to variation along this parameter. The social role constellation inside the role-play situation may be equal or unequal for a pair inside that situation:

$A = B$

$A \neq B$

If one of the pair members of an unequal social role relationship has essentially the role of a foreign learner, his role may be superior or inferior to that of his interactant:

$A > B$

$A < B$

(3) A third variable affecting the degree of teacher control over the interaction is clearly the extent to which the verbalisations used are given. This ranges from instructions such as "practise the dialogues on the blackboard/on page x of your book" to a simple specification of the situation, and the roles of the participants, and no further limitations. Between these two extremes, degrees of 'control' are possible: controlling the structure of the interaction is of course one such. In addition, consider the following:

(a) The learner is given information such that a particular communicative intention is predictable from the situation he is in:

> You have travelled by train to Birmingham and are trying to get to an address in Broad Street. By chance you hear a girl of about your age at the Enquiries Desk (in front of you) asking where Broad Street is. You decide to speak to her.

(b) The learner is told how he reacts to the situation he is to find himself in:

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You have just discovered that your roommate with whom you share a university flat has been eating your food and drinking your coffee again. As this has happened several times before, and as you will now have to go without yourself, you decide to talk the matter out with her. You are so angry that you want to make her go out now and buy the missing food items for you.

(c) The learner is given some indication of what type of talk may occur, and some 'useful phrases' to use. For example, for (a) above, we might have:

- Excuse me, are you by any chance ...
- Oh really
- You don't say ... so am I
- Could we perhaps ...
- Why don't we ...

(d) Possible utterances are specified, but this is done in the form of options for particular stages of the interaction, or indeed for potential sequences inside the situation, depending on the reaction of one of the participants. These options might be elicited via discussion before the role-play is attempted. The learner is given a set of utterances to use, but chooses from amongst them.

(4) The degree of cognitive teaching accompanying such role-play is the fourth major variable.[19] The material we provide later in this book attempts at many points to suggest why people behave the way they do interactionally, and this type of discussion seems to us intrinsically valuable, particularly with intermediate or advanced learners. The degree of explicitness used is a major variable then. Given that some attempt to explicate interactional behaviour is deemed useful, this may be done of course before or after, or in the middle of, the presentation and practice of the dialogue material: crudely, we may encourage deductive or inductive mental processing.

(5) The use and type of feedback given is our fifth variable. The dilemma of the teacher is as follows: if he constantly monitors learner-performance in role-play, and corrects it when necessary, the target discourse will rapidly degenerate into pedagogic discourse (speakers will look at the teacher while speaking, use a rising intonation inappropriately, maybe become nervous and self-conscious, and so on). On the other hand, if the teacher does not monitor at all, he may feel he is not in a position to know what, if any, learning is going on, and what, if any, 'mistakes' are being made. Firstly, it should be said that role-play without teacher-monitoring is not necessarily a waste of time. If preparation and degree of control are appropriate, few mistakes should be occurring, and further feedback is occurring without the teacher in that the individual learner is talking to somebody: in other words, he is getting important feedback from his

interactant. A useful procedure to encourage self-evaluation among learners is to, for example, establish groups of three learners, only two of whom practise a particular role-play at any one time. The third listens, observes and afterwards offers comments. All three members of each group then should have the opportunity to assume the monitoring role. Secondly, the teacher can monitor selectively, either by visiting different groups briefly, or by having several groups repeat their performance in front of the class, and afterwards offering comments on one or two specific points only. It seems a good idea in fact to tell the learners beforehand what you are specifically interested in checking on. Thirdly, audio-recording and video-recording allow of more thorough feedback. Recording is only effective however, for this purpose, if background noise is low: this may mean in practice only one role-play can be going on while the recording is being made in a classroom. It is essential, if this is done, that the feedback offered not be exclusively negative! Some factors contributing to differences in the variable use of feedback are therefore whether it 'officially' occurs at all, and if so, by whom, to what degree and on the basis of what data.

(6) A clear variable – our sixth variable – is the size and structure of the interacting group engaging in a specific game or role-play. The following possible groupings seem nigh-on exhaustive:

(a) Teacher (T) and Rest of Class (R)

Clearly, one game can be played by the whole of the class, the teacher umpiring, setting the rules, keeping points, and so on. It is also possible to practise simple group interactions such as "Oh My Gosh" or 'heckling'. In the first case, the teacher narrates a story or other account, and the class simply produce appreciative noises of the kind: "Good heavens", "Really", "You don't say". In the second case of 'heckling', the goal is to show a negative reception[20] – perhaps to a piece of oratory indulged in by the teacher: "Go on", "Don't believe a word of it", "Boo", "Go home", "Rubbish", "What about the workers", and so on. The teacher has to struggle through with his speech against this background of appreciative/non-appreciative acclaim. Practice in Uptaking and Gambits – categories which we will introduce later in this book (see Chapter 4) – is clearly taking place. Yet, 'heckling' may only work in certain linguacultures: it is difficult to envisage a group of East Asian learners intensively heckling a speaker, even if this is part of the role-play. That is, some tasks are clearly culture-specific and can be counter-productive outside of their normal linguacultural occurrence.[21]

(b) Individual Learner (L_1) and Rest of Class (R)

For this constellation, the most obvious situation is that in which a learner assumes the teacher role – this can be done quite seriously and

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quite unseriously. In either case, the class response can be much more cooperative than if the teacher retains his role himself.

(c) Teacher (T) and Individual Learner (L_1)

We have previously suggested in this chapter that this constellation can be less than successfully employed in many linguacultures. Its general advantage, however, is its ease of organisation and ease of control.

(d) Two individual learners (R and T watch and listen)

For demonstration purposes, and for monitoring and display purposes after group practice, this is clearly a useful constellation.

(e) The constellation as in (d) may have a group of more than two learners (3 to *n*).

(f) Class divides into pairs (T may selectively monitor). Probably the standard grouping.

(g) As in (f), but the groupings may be of three or more learners.

(h) As in (f) and (g) but one or more 'monitoring' learners sit in on each group to offer feedback.

(7) There are variables in all these constellations, and particularly (f), (g) and (h) above, so the groupings need to be varied, and roles may be reversed, or changed round inside one particular grouping. This is our seventh variable. The nature of the stimulus used for it is, for example:

(a) the presence or absence of a visual, oral or textual 'stimulus' for the role-play or game;

(b) whether or not each learner assuming a role is aware of what information his role-playing partner(s) has/have. It is in fact possible, for example, to ensure disagreement by giving two or more players different information.

(8) Further, in enacting the role-play, the presence or absence of 'props' such as clothes to dress up in, articles to buy, a newspaper to borrow, and so on, is clearly a variable.

(9) The seating arrangement adopted in the classroom is our ninth variable (probably largely determined by the sixth variable above), as is of course the geographical location of the play – i.e. one might wish to use some other part of the building where the teaching takes place, or indeed leave the teaching venue altogether in order to achieve a more congenial setting for a particular endeavour.

(10) The final tenth variable we wish to mention is the presence or absence of uniformity of role-play activity. In other words, it does not have to be the case that only one activity is being carried on in class at any one time. For

example, alternative situations might be suggested. More radically, of course, completely different activities may be going on simultaneously in different parts of the classroom. There are many games, of course, in which one team 'leaves the room' and hatches a strategy before re-appearing. If the teacher is confident that he is not necessary for constant monitoring, he has perhaps the opportunity to organise flexible, varied activities by sending one group off to practise one type of role-play before organising some other activity for some other group.

After having discussed the pedagogic background of this, let us now start introducing our theoretical framework.

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