



**EXPLORING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL STRUCTURE OF  
FORMAL ESL INSTRUCTION IN CLASSROOM TALK – A  
CASE STUDY OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN BRUNEI**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
Applied Linguistics  
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University of Adelaide

April 2003

## Abstract

Findings in current English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) studies suggest that, among other things, students in the ESL classroom have not been given opportunities to improve their oral language proficiency. Specifically, classroom researchers and language educationists remain puzzled over the apparently meaningless practices that occur in the classroom, particularly between the teacher and students. This study explores the argument that a structure exists in ESL formal instruction, one that has evolved from the social and cultural norms of language education in the school. It is further argued that this factor has largely been overlooked and inadequately accounted for in past and current ESL studies. Drawing on relevant aspects of the socio-cultural theory of second language acquisition, this study is an attempt to subject the socio-cultural structure of ESL formal instruction to explicit study. Particularly, it is an exploration of the workings of this structure in the oral practices of the language classroom in the ESL country of Brunei. A combination of the ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches to data collection and analysis has been employed. The findings have provided insights for formal ESL teaching and learning in particular and second language acquisition in general. The study has helped capture the complexity of what constitutes “communication” in the language classroom within the formal school setting. By doing this, it helps to explain the perplexity expressed by language specialists and teachers that language classrooms, particularly those in the ESL societies, are uncommunicative despite innovations having been made in teaching and learning methods. One specific explanation offered is the simplistic way in which the transformation principle of language learning currently operates in the formal ESL setting. Another significant implication of this study is that it provides a new dimension to addressing issues in language education in that whilst most sociolinguistic studies of ESL have focused on communicative events in language classrooms, this study expands the focus to include the wider situational context. It has further demonstrated the usefulness of making connections between linguistics and language education to gain insights into formal language acquisition in the school.

Statement of authorship

This thesis contains no material which has previously been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. The author also consents to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan when accepted for the award of the degree.

Signed.

Date. 23.09.2003

## Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank, as no research work of this magnitude is ever a solitary effort. Along the way, I have been driven, motivated and supported by many people who placed their confidence in me and my work. In particular, I am deeply thankful to my husband, Solomon Soo, for his steadfast love and support.

I am also more grateful than I can express to:

Dr. Peter Mickan, for his optimism, inspiration and generous support throughout the research period. Thank you for the hours of constructive discussion sessions which have helped to provide focus and direction to the study.

Professor Peter Mühlhäusler, whose critical appreciation of the issues under study has helped me approach the study within a thoughtful and practical framework.

The administrators, teachers and students of St. Andrew's School, Brunei, for allowing me to carry out my work in the school and so patiently enduring the "intrusion" of an outsider for so long a period.

Dr. Ron Newbold, who as the postgraduate co-ordinator of the Department of European Studies and General Linguistics, has provided me with valuable assistance wherever possible, particularly with the administrative and technical aspects along the way.

Mr. Alan Keig, for his generous assistance during my search for the research literature pertaining to my work.

Mrs. Jackie Mühlhäusler, whose excellent editorial skills will always be deeply appreciated.

I am also thankful to my colleagues and potentially eminent linguists and applied linguists in "Room 137" for their friendship, suggestions and cheerful assistance. Thank you Pai, Fazeli and Petter.

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## Abbreviations

This thesis contains the following abbreviations, which are presented here in alphabetical order together with what they stand for. Malay terms are italicised and their English translations are put between brackets.

BGCE “O” Level	Brunei-Cambridge General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESOL	English to Speakers of Other Languages
FL	Foreign Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
S	Student
S3	Student, known
SS	Students
(M)	Initial of student’s name to represent a particular student
P	Principal

PMB	<i>Penilaian Menengah Bawah</i> (Examination at the Lower Secondary). End of the secondary three year public exam.
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
T1	Teacher, known

# Chapter 1

## A Background to the Study

### 1.0 Introduction

In the last two decades or more, the English language classroom in English as a second language (henceforth ESL) societies has been subjected to intense scrutiny. One common observation has been the students' contribution or lack of it to the talk that goes on in the classroom (Widdowson, 1987; Nunan, 1987; Tsui, 1985; Lai, 1994; Furahata, 1999). These studies find that to a large extent language lessons are still very much tied to traditional overt teaching of grammar rules, that teachers continue to dominate classroom behaviour with minimal student participation. The perception is that students remain orally incompetent although structurally knowledgeable in the second language (henceforth L2) (Verma, 1989).

This has been a worrying thought for countries where, although English is not the first or native language of the people, it nevertheless is significant for progress, advancement and even survival in this age of globalisation and improved international communication where English plays a key role. Particularly for ESL countries like Brunei, Malaysia and even Singapore, it has become imperative that not only should L2 speakers know about the language, they must also know how to use it communicatively to interact meaningfully with the wider English - speaking world. Thus, in schools, communicative competence in the English language, not only in the written mode but also in the oral mode is seen to be both desirable and necessary.

Accordingly, attempts have been made by curriculum developers, teacher trainers and language educationalists to promote student oral participation in the language classroom. The trend in ESL education has been towards the promotion of a classroom that is significantly different from that of the traditional one where there is one-way transmission of knowledge and grammar rules from teachers to

students in a teacher-centred classroom with students as passive recipients. This non-traditional classroom is envisaged by Kamaravadivelu (1993):

A communicative classroom seeks to promote interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning. This means learners ought to be active, not just reactive, in class. They should be encouraged to ask for information, seek clarification, express an opinion, agree and/or disagree with peers and teachers. More importantly, they should be guided to go beyond memorized and monitored repetitions in order to initiate and participate in meaningful interaction. (p.12)

From the extract above, it is clear that there is a desire for classrooms where a lot more attention is paid to the oral development of language among students. With this idea of classroom interaction in mind, attempts have been made by ESL educators in all quarters of the teaching profession to change classroom practices. A considerable amount of effort and capital have been invested to improve and develop teacher training programmes, instruction strategies and the like, with the aim of promoting classroom L2 learning. New tasks and activities have been introduced to engage students in sustained oral behaviour, even to the extent of imposing on teachers and students new communicative classroom teaching and learning methods and getting rid of grammar teaching altogether. However, the expected results have not been forthcoming. In his most recent review of English language teaching in South East Asia, Ho (1998) points out that despite the implementation of changes, the language classroom in the region remains largely unchanged. Traditional practices are still the mainstay of L2 instruction in schools.

It has to be noted that so far, research studies on ESL classrooms have focused on the classroom per se. Not much light has been shed on the wider school context that embeds the classroom. To put it in Gebhard's (1999) words:

In regard to classroom studies of second language acquisition (SLA), the concept that classroom contexts are embedded within and shaped by a larger school and social context has been relatively unexplored. (p.551)

An in-depth study of the social and cultural workings of the school and their connections with language classroom practices has yet to be fully implemented in current ESL research work.

### 1.1 A rationale for the study

Of course, there have been passing references made to the school setting in classroom studies that provide glimpses of the bigger school community. Karava-Dourka (1993) in her studies of public secondary schools illustrates the scepticism of school principals about the practicality of new teaching theories, in their reluctance to send language teachers for refresher courses to improve the standard of English teaching. Evans and Kong's (1997) study shows how schools in Hong Kong fail to integrate communicative changes in the English language teaching into the overall curriculum. They argue that principals frequently view changes to new teaching methods to be within the local concern of the classroom or teacher and not the overall structure of school instruction.

English language teachers in Brunei also face a number of problems inherent in the school system in which they operate. While they have been trained in new teaching methods, in practice they find themselves enmeshed in a system that assesses student performance in terms of grades obtained from content-based exams and assessments. Therefore opportunities for promoting the oral aspect of the L2 are very limited. Findings drawn from ESL primary classrooms, for example, have yielded similar unsatisfactory results in terms of student participation and use of the target language. Although very little is known about the secondary classroom, the primary English language classroom is found to be non-interactive (Martin, 1995; Baetens-Beardsmore, 1995; Jones, in press).

Classroom studies have been tremendously valuable in terms of what they reveal. Their findings provide important information and insights into language-in-action through observations of interactive activities in a naturally occurring context. However, despite earnest efforts made to redress the “problems” of the L2 classrooms in ESL situations, the research literature still shows that by and large, the L2 classrooms have remained unchanged. More to the point is the question: is the ESL classroom as “problematic” as it is made out to be, or is it merely exhibiting features that represent the larger instructional framework of the school? A look at the current research literature shows that this question has yet to be addressed in an adequate way as far as ESL formal acquisition is concerned. This is especially true for countries where English is not the language of the wider population or where there is a shared colonial past with a native English speaking country.

It is my view that the school is an organization with the specific purpose of training young people. Over years of the socialization process, it has taken on particular social and cultural norms which particularize it and give it identity, norms which may be apparent in the dissemination of the various disciplines which it offers. Because the classroom is embedded within the school setting physically, its practices cannot be but linked in significant ways to the school’s overall socio-cultural structure. Viewed from this angle, I believe that very little that happens in the classroom is left to chance. Oral behaviour in the language classroom, for example, is neither random nor unplanned but is deliberate and methodical with the aim of aligning itself to the expectations of the ESL instruction of the school in terms of the way the English language is being taught and learnt. Thus, failure to look at the classroom in terms of its larger school context may result in the failure to achieve a better understanding of L2 acquisition in the classroom.

This is not to discredit the current literature of ESL classroom studies but to bring about the potential of providing a wider socio-cultural viewpoint to address the issue of L2 school instruction. Around and behind classroom practices resides a framework that has been largely ignored but which may be a significant piece of

the puzzle that can help make sense of the oral behaviour of teachers and students in the classroom.

### 1.2 Purpose of the study

This study seeks to explore the socio-cultural structure of ESL school instruction in classroom talk. In particular, it attempts to subject the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in school to an explicit examination. It does this by (i) obtaining a perception of the operative elements of this particular structure, (ii) identifying the significant features that constitute classroom talk during the English lesson and (iii) establishing the extent to which the socio-cultural structure is mutually expressed and realized in classroom talk. The study is carried out in an English secondary school in Brunei, a country located in the Southeast Asian region. It must be pointed out here that the purpose of the study is not to highlight the weaknesses of language instruction in the school, but to provide another perspective on why people in ESL classrooms in such situations behave as they do.

### 1.3 The research questions

To provide focus and direction to the study, the following research questions are posited:

- (i) What are the socio-cultural elements that make up the structure of formal ESL instruction at the secondary school level?
- (ii) What are the significant features of classroom talk during the English language class?
- (iii) To what extent is the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction expressed and realized in the features of classroom talk?



#### 1.4 Definition of terms

Similar terms may take on different definitions or meanings for different researchers. There are a number of terms used in this study that require definitions for them to serve their purposes.

*Socio-cultural perspective.* Here, the ESL classroom is looked at from an angle that takes into account the traditional social and cultural norms of ESL instruction of the wider school community. This is assuming that the ESL instruction in the school is a result of the socialization of certain social and cultural practices pertaining to language instruction evolved over the years to form expected patterns of behaviour.

*Socio-cultural structure* refers to the systematic organization of mutual social and cultural beliefs and values about ESL school instruction held by members both within and outside the school community. In an important sense, it functions as the pedagogic discourse in the formal ESL school instruction. Perhaps, what needs to be further clarified and defined here is the word “structure”. The “structure” referred to throughout this study does not suggest a universally fixed or unitary organizational package but rather is seen from a dialogical perspective, arising from mutually and sometimes conflicting value-laden practices. According to this definition, “structure” is taken to be a temporary, partial and flexible organisation of socio-cultural elements in ESL instruction. In other words, it is seen as a process rather than a product, a transformation rather than a fixity, fluidity rather than stagnancy.

*Elements of socio-cultural structure* refer to the particular rules of ESL instruction established by the structure. These rules govern the way English as a subject is taught and learnt in school while at the same time ensures the maintenance and efficiency of the structure. “Elements” rather than “principles” is preferred here to suggest that the constituents that make up the structure are not discrete nor universal. Language assessment and language skills in language learning, for example, are not segregated elements but may either be complementary to contradictory to each other. They are not universal because the same elements

may not appear in the educational settings in other situations or societies or circumstances.

*Classroom oral practice* is the amalgamation of the significant features that constitute the talk in the language classroom.

*Classroom talk* refers strictly to the observable verbal behaviour of the teacher and students in the language classroom. Here, it is restricted to the linguistic patterns of the conversations between the teacher and students and the teacher's instruction within the language classroom.

*English as a primary language* refers to the English spoken in naturally occurring contexts where the language is not subject to assessment or evaluation. One example of such a context is the everyday conversation where the aim is to understand and be understood rather than be assessed on the language used.

*English as a secondary language* refers to the English learnt in school as a subject, to be evaluated and examined for extrinsic purposes such as entry to higher studies and the job market.

*Recontextualised language* refers to the transformation and relocation of the English language for purposes of transmission and acquisition in the school context

### 1.5 Organisation of the study

This study is organized in eight chapters. Chapter one provides the background and rationale for the study. It also contains the purpose of the study and the three main guiding research questions. A list of definitions of terms and concepts used throughout the study is also located in this chapter. Chapter two is devoted to looking at sources of research literature pertaining to the study. It is divided into two parts. In Literature Review I, the focus is on a current review of studies about the social and cultural practices of schools as educational settings. Literature Review II consists of a literature review of related studies carried out on verbal

behaviour of language classrooms. Chapter three contains the methodology of data collection and data analysis. A review of the various methods of data collection is provided, together with a detailed discussion of the methods of analysis used in the study. Chapter four provides information about the context for the study. Here, background information about the ESL teaching and learning situation in Brunei is provided. In addition, the chapter also gives important related information about the particular school and classroom under study. Chapters five to seven focus on findings made pertaining to the research questions posited at the beginning of the study. In addition, each chapter ends with a discussion of the specific findings. Chapter eight is a final discussion of the overall findings and results of analyses made in the three preceding chapters. In an attempt to consolidate the argument, it carries out a discursive review of each research question, followed by the implications of the study and directions for further research within this particular field. The study ends with a conclusion that summarises the study in a sensible and argumentatively sound manner.

### Summary

This chapter shows that the main concern among ESL countries is the lack of students' oral production in the language classroom. Despite numerous studies on classroom behaviour and attempts at changes and innovations to improve the quality of the L2 classroom teaching and learning, oral communication has remained largely teacher dominated with minimal student contribution. However, these studies tend to draw conclusions from observations of classrooms per se. The fact that classrooms are situated and embedded within the larger school context has either been ignored or taken for granted. The purpose of this study then is to provide a socio-cultural perspective for looking at ESL instruction in the school in an ESL society. In particular, it intends to carry out a focused and analytical study of the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction at the institutional level. Certainly, an understanding of this structure will help to make better sense of classroom L2 acquisition in the formal educational setting.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review 1:**

#### **ESL Instruction in the School and the Socio-cultural Theory**

##### **2.1.0 Introduction**

This section of the chapter provides a framework which attempts to encapsulate the socio-cultural structure of school ESL instruction. Based on the review of literature in second language acquisition (henceforth SLA), the first part of the section traces the emergence of socio-cultural theory in SLA. In particular, it defines the theory against the backdrop of social and cultural studies grounded in sociology and sociolinguistics in order to explain its compelling potential in providing new insights into the phenomenon of language classroom oral behaviour. The second part of the section attempts to reframe the socio-cultural theory of SLA in ESL classroom learning in the school setting. Based on a review of ESL research literature, an argument will be put forward for the need to look at the verbal behaviour of the L2 classroom from a sociological viewpoint that takes into account the social beliefs and cultures of the wider school community. The third and final part shows how related research literature indicates the existence of a socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school that acts to fulfill its goals and objectives of language teaching and learning.

##### **2.1.1 The socio-cultural theory of SLA**

The argument put forward is that the focus of current SLA studies has been about individual cognitive and information-processing issues (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Block, 1996). These studies have generated cognitively oriented research that, while it has contributed tremendously to SLA, fails to account for the socio-cultural dimensions of language such as context, discourse and interaction (Thorne in Lantolf, 2000). Certainly, it is quite clear that until the advance of the socio-cultural argument, language has been seen as something that is constructed within the individual and therefore the fundamental link to language acquisition is

the brain. Not unexpectedly, SLA studies have traditionally been biased towards psychological and cognitive approaches. Increasingly, however, there is the emerging awareness among researchers and linguists that these approaches present but one dimension of the complex phenomenon of SLA (Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Salomon, 1993; Hutchins, 1995).

The idea of a socio-cultural theory in language studies is not new. As early as the 1920s, Malinowski (1923, 1935) introduced his theory of context of situation and context of culture. Focusing on speech behaviour, he argues that in order to understand the message of a language, one needs to know the situation and also the culture in which the speech is taking place. His argument is that language is pragmatic and is therefore very much determined by the immediate environment in which it is used. His concepts of language context and culture have over the years been refined and reframed. Hymes (1967; 1972), who introduces the ethnography of communication, proposes that a context or situation is determined by the number of its definitive social characteristics. He believes that communicative competence, particularly in the oral mode, is dependent on the fulfillment of these characteristics. His suggestion is that any approach used to study language use must therefore

take as context a community, investigating its communicative habits as a whole, so that any given use of channel and code takes its place as but part of the resources upon which the members of the community draw (1964:3)

The assumption here is that, in any specific context that functions as a community, the patterns of language use among its members reflect the communicative norms of that context. There is thus a close and interrelated link between the speech behaviour of the members in a community and the speech behaviour of that community as a whole.

Gumperz (1972), who introduces the concept of interactional sociolinguistics, shares a common belief with Hymes in his studies on code-switching within a speech situation. His studies have led him to discover the ways in which

individuals convey social and cultural meanings during the process of interaction. According to Halliday (1994; 1985) and Halliday and Hasan (1989), language is a social semiotic in that it is an interactive phenomenon and acts as a social exchange of meanings. Furthermore, they believe that these meanings constitute or are constituted by the social system exchanged by members of a particular environment. It is not difficult to see that the consensual thread that runs through these influential arguments is that context and culture are somehow linked to language in a fundamental way. Thus, the patterns and features of language use among the members in a particular setting do reflect the social, cultural and historical norms of the context or social system of that setting. This realization has brought about the renewal of focus and attention on the socio-cultural aspect of SLA.

### 2.1.2 The socio-cultural theory in SLA – a definition

In elaborating the Vygotskian sense of socio-cultural theory from a sociological standpoint, Lantolf (2000) explains that the socio-cultural aspect of human culture is concerned with how “the different types of symbolic tools developed by human cultures throughout the course of their histories affected the kinds of mediation favoured, and with it the kinds of thinking valued by these cultures (for example, the impact of such artifacts as numeracy, literacy, and computers on thinking) (p.3).” By reframing this theoretical explanation within formal SLA, the behaviours and patterns of language produced in the L2 classroom are seen to be influenced to a considerable extent by the traditionally valued behaviours and patterns of language instruction within the school culture.

In redefining Vygotsky (1978) in terms of formal ESL instruction, the socio-cultural theory can be best described as the emphasis on the individual language learner within the collective, social and cultural conditions. According to him, language is socially constructed rather than inherently individual. It is used to refer to and construct social reality rather than individual achievement. According to this theory, practices in language learning and use are derived from the larger social, political and historical contexts and structures and both act to mutually influence one another (Hall, 1995; Ortner, 1984). Van Lier (2000) explains the

socio-cultural theory from an ecological perspective. From this viewpoint, language use is seen to be both representational and ecological in the sense that it represents the cultural, historical and social norms of the environment through the practices of its members. As such, language is seen to be inherently dialogical (Bakhtin, 1981) and semiotic or meaning-making. Butterworth (in Van Lier, 2000) puts forward the issue as follows:

On the ecological view, perception is necessarily situated within the ecology since it consists in obtaining information from the active relation between the organization and a structural environment. Indeed, it is the process of perception that situates the organism in the environment (p.3)

In L2 acquisition, the sociocultural theory is committed to looking at human actions and societal contexts and as such, the theory has generated newer avenues for SLA research, one of which is the adoption of a sociolinguistic viewpoint in SLA studies. Furthermore, the conception of discourse within such a sociolinguistic standpoint will be as a form of social practice, one of the three concepts of discourse put forward by Fairclough (1999). As a social practice, Fairclough views discourse “as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared commonsense procedures” and asserts that the discourse of the members of particular communities “is shaped by” and “has outcomes and effects upon social structures around them, of which again they are usually unaware” (p.72). By rephrasing this view of discourse in the context of ESL school instruction, it can be argued that the language produced in the classroom by teachers and students is based on their mutual understanding of the social and cultural norms of language instruction in the larger school environment. Thus, classroom linguistic behaviour is shaped by and in turn reflects the linguistic behaviour of the school or educational institution of which it is a part.

### 2.1.3 The socio-cultural perspective in ESL education

It would appear that the change in SLA studies from a psycholinguistic to a context-sensitive explanation of the processes involved has brought about a

parallel change in ESL and L2 classroom learning. The parallel shift appears to be anticipated by the argument put forward by Halliday and Hasan (1985). They believe that formal learning is a social process and the environment in which it takes place is that of a social institution and therefore the social dimension of language education questions must become particularly significant. Both Halliday and Hasan have also acknowledged that the socio-cultural issues of language acquisition have been the most neglected in discussion of language education. This criticism of the lack of attention paid to a socio-cultural perspective is shared by Gebhard (1999). Indeed, she claims that there has yet to be a detailed and focused investigation of the ways in which the relationship between practice and structure plays a role in the L2 learning process. Researchers from a psycholinguistic paradigm (Gass, 1998; Long, 1997) however, suggest that such investigations may be beyond the scope of inquiry in L2 studies. While they do acknowledge the importance of social interaction factors for explaining SLA, negotiating a sound and robust research methodology of unstable variables such as “context” and “interaction” can be complex and difficult.

Complex and complicated though it may be, researchers have only just begun to see the significant role social and cultural factors play in L2 classroom learning. Van Lier (1996; 1998; 2000) attempts to capture the interplay between macro social structures and micro ongoing practices and argues that the activities of everyday life are a reflection to a certain extent of the resources and constraints that a particular social or institutional setting provides. McDermott (1996) concludes from his case study of a learning disabled child that what students learn in the classroom is socially constructed by an education system that is designed to select who learns and what they learn. According to Oakes (1986), the organizational structures in schools either give or deny students’ access into discourses of academic success. Harklau (1994) believes that classroom SLA is shaped by cultures and structures at work in the education system. In her study of ESOL (English as a second or other language) students in a United States high school, she finds that students are exposed to different teaching structures in the school depending on whether they are in low track or high track classes.



Thus, in a Vygotskian sense, language use is viewed as a social activity that acts to mediate between classroom practices and the degree to which they adhere to or agree with the social and cultural norms of language instruction in the school. Furthermore, from readings of education and, in particular, language education studies (Bernstein, 2000; Christie, 2000; Bourdieu, Passeron and St. Martin, 1996) it has become clear that the framing of classroom practices within the larger school discourse may be mutual, but not equal. What this means is that, while there may be reciprocity between practice and structure, one is shown to embed the other. Based on Bernstein's (1999:33) recontextualising principle, the suggestion is that schools do manipulate and relocate subject disciplines from their natural discourse to a secondary discourse. He gives a particularly useful and clear example of what he means by the recontextualising principle:

When I was at school I spent three years in a large room with wooden benches and with side benches with saws and hammers and chisels. After three years, I had a pile of wood chippings as high as the bench itself. But what was I doing? Well, what I was doing was this: *outside* pedagogy there was *carpentry*, but *inside* pedagogy there was *woodwork*. In other words, here was a transformation of a real discourse called carpentry into an imaginary discourse called woodwork (p.33).

Thus, in ESL instruction, it can be said that the English language in its primary context has been transformed into a secondary language to be disseminated as a learning subject in the school. Moreover, according to Bernstein (2000) and Christie (1998) the transformation is based on some selective criteria of pedagogical instruction in the school. For the objectives and goals of language instruction to be met, there must be a mutual relationship between what is prescribed and what is practiced. Inevitably, there must also be the domination of one over the other. Kramsch (1993) confirms this unequal relationship in the school system and concludes that because learning itself is a creation of educational discourse, so the behaviour of a language classroom must be measured against whatever communicative or intellectual goals are deemed appropriate or acceptable in its particular educational setting.

The important indication here is that language classrooms are related in some fundamental way to the social practices, values and beliefs concerning how the English language should be taught and learnt in the school. This in itself shows the importance of addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of ESL learning in the educational institution. Van Lier (2000) call this the “ecological approach” (p.245) to looking at L2 classroom learning, similar to the way the term has been used more explicitly in the recent work on language by Makkai (1993) and Muhlhausler (1996) in the sense that the maintenance of a particular linguistic environment is possible only if a collaborative effort is made by its members to sustain and maintain its linguistic history. Van Lier draws a parallel between the ecological approach and the Vygotskian socio-cultural theory by defining language as:

the totality of linguistic activities and relationships among speakers and between speakers and the physical, social, personal, cultural and historical world they live in (p.259)

Looked at from this viewpoint, it can be suggested that language learning in the classroom is similar to the way a student “learns” a school or a patient “learns” the hospital or clinic. Just as students learn how to take on the types of behaviour that are deemed desirable and appropriate as members of the institution, they learn to comply with the linguistic behaviours that are appropriate in the classroom so as to maintain a harmonious working relationship with the teacher.

#### 2.1.4 The socio-culture of ESL instruction in the school

To fully understand the socio-cultural framework of ESL instruction, it is important to first appreciate the concept of school and its purpose. It is the understanding that the school is a specific context with a specific purpose, and that is to provide an environment where learning can take place (Widdowson, 1990; Taylor, 1994). According to them, learning is also about pedagogy, and the very

fact that learning cannot occur without teaching. Perhaps this point is most clearly put across by Widdowson (1990):

For the whole point of pedagogy is that it is a way of short-circuiting the slow process of natural discovery and can make arrangement for learning to happen more easily and more efficiently than it does in 'natural surroundings'. That is what schools are for, whatever subject we are dealing with. Pedagogy is bound to be a contrivance. That is precisely its purpose. If what went on in classrooms exactly replicated the conditions of the world outside, there would be no point in pedagogy at all (p.163).

By framing this frank appraisal of school pedagogy within the instruction of ESL, it is quite obvious that for English learning to be successful, the natural discourse of the English language will have to be manipulated and transformed to make it accessible for study in the classroom. Kramsch (1998) calls this the discourse of the academia. According to her, the academia discourse of each discipline of study in the school embodies the traditional social and cultural factors of school education, with the result that a set of socio-cultural norms are established for instruction. It has been argued that these norms act to influence and shape the behaviour in classrooms, that they are realized through the actions of students and teachers in the classroom (Manke, 1997; Lantolf, 2000). In particular, the interactional behaviour of teachers and students in the language classroom, upon closer study, does show aspects of these norms operating in the larger school context.

While there has not been much written about the socio-cultural norms in ESL classroom studies, a review of related research literature on language education in general does show indications of a distinct socio-cultural structure operating in formal language instruction. A recurrent observation made is that the language learnt in the school does not resemble the language used or that spoken in the outside world. It is found that the language of the school is based on literate and academic knowledge and based on the written word (Barnes, 1972; Widdowson, 1978, Byrnes, 1998) in the sense that emphasis is placed on the standard written

code found in formal texts, even in oral communication in the classroom. The promotion and sanctioned use of 'schooled' language serves to single out the superiority of one linguistic code over the others.

According to Bernstein (1990) and Bourdieu, Passeron and St. Martin (1996), the deliberate propagation and prestige given to the school code operate to discriminate the "educated" scholar from the "uneducated" person. This discrimination has been shown in the earlier works of Bernstein. In concluding that two codes of language use exist in the school – the elaborated and restricted codes, Bernstein argues that the elaborated or middle class code has been favoured in schools over the restricted or working class code. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991) argues that the legitimate school language is "impersonal and anonymous" (p.48) with the aim of devaluing slang or colloquial use of the language.

Others question the relevance of the language learnt in the school to the world outside. Corbette and Blum (1993) argue that school language has failed to help students make a connection between what they learn in schools and the real world. In India, for example, students leave schools with all that formal language knowledge without knowing how to apply what they have learnt in real life situations (Verma, 1989). It would appear that this is also a problem faced by students in the L1 classroom, which has prompted Woods, Dias and Ellis (1997) to question the relevance of English study in schools to students' lives and future. They argue that much of the English learnt in the schools cannot be applied to the workplace, for example. The suggestion is that the English language of the school should be aligned to the language needs in the real world.

Garner (2001), however, argues that while formal school language may be far removed from everyday use, it does serve its purpose within the educational objectives of the school. It prescribes and underlines the "normative conventions" (p.6) of good linguistic skills. His argument, however, provokes the suggestion that unless certain prescriptive norms of formal learning are adhered to, there is little chance for successful L1 or L2 learning to occur. Furthermore, this suggests that there is a standard, preferred language code over other codes in the school. He is quick to provide the example that writing skills will improve with a better grasp

of school language, although he refrains from making any comments about whether the formal linguistic code has helped in developing the oral aspect of language learning.

In his study of French university students' attitudes to academic teaching, Vincent (1996) found that working class students have positive attitudes towards the academic language of teaching largely because they want to "acquire the spirit and culture peculiar to higher education, the type of education which symbolizes membership of the elite" (p. 109). This finding supports the argument that there are indeed two contrasting "classes" of language – the superior language of the school and the common language of the masses. The finding also suggests that students are extrinsically rather than intrinsically motivated to learn the language so as to be part of the elite, educated group.

Another well-documented feature in language education is the hierarchical structure of authority. According to Hotho (1998), the hierarchical structure in many schools today still presents the subject and teacher at the top of the academic ladder with students as passive recipients at the bottom. This appears to be true especially in societies where English is a second or foreign language. In Brunei, for instance, it is expected that students do not question the authority of their teachers in the classroom (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1995). Cotterall (1998) speaks of the relationship between language teachers and students in schools in Japan and concluded that a "large power distance (p.68) operates in the English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL) classes in countries like Japan, Taiwan and Korea. By a large power distance, she means that the relationship between students and teachers remains strictly that of instructor and learner with each assigned to defined positions within the hierarchy of authority. Respect for the teacher is very important and learning success relies heavily on the linguistic competence of the teacher. A large power distance also means a wider chasm among the different groups, that is the administrators, teachers and students. Thus the communication between students and administration is shown to be remote and inaccessible.

This hierarchical authority in language learning has come under strong criticism. Studies show that it operates to confine students into playing passive roles in language classrooms (Nunan 1987; Ellis, 1992; Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Widdowson, 1978). These studies demonstrate that a well-defined structure of authority discourages students from using the language they are learning. Wells (1999) concedes that in schools, teachers are expected to act as a leader. However, he insists that leadership should be exercised in a such a manner that students can still play a significant role in negotiating how they want to achieve their language learning goals. Cotterall (1998) points out that autonomous learning is particularly important in language learning as this kind of learning involves students in using the target language to express themselves. This argument poses a problem because “autonomous learning” here suggests learning that occurs in a value-free and objective context. A school, however, is a community with a set of definite social and cultural values associated with it, the hierarchical structure of authority being one of them. The existence of a well-defined form of authority makes it quite impossible to advocate any kind of autonomous language learning largely because students are not expected to act outside the role assigned to them. She goes on to add that, in reality, the teacher-student relationship is such that it becomes difficult for students to really get involved in the lesson.

There are, however, indications from educational studies that the teacher’s authority is one that is conferred on him/her by the institution itself. According to Heslep (2001), the asymmetrical communication that results from drawing clear lines of authority is about “instrumentalism” (p.191). It is a tool employed by the educational institution to get learners to satisfy the pedagogical objectives of language learning. Vanderstraat (2001) believes that a form of “intentional socialization” (p.385) is at work here. What he means is that teachers and students are deliberately socialized into their roles within the school organization in order to avoid the possibility of rejection of instruction or information transmitted. For the school, such a possibility can jeopardize the stability of the system. This type of socialization suggests that the socialization process in schools operates to manipulate teachers and students into collaborating with the overall objectives of language learning in the school. Teachers and students are therefore not free to

choose what roles they wish to play in their teaching and learning, but have their positions within the school system assigned to them.

Thus, because teachers are socialized into an authoritative role as that of transmitter of knowledge, it is not unexpected that they perceive the use of terms like “learner autonomy” and “student-centredness” to be a threat that seeks to undermine their authority in the classroom (McDevitt, 1997; Grenfell, 1997; Harmer, 1995). Even if they do attempt to change the status quo, they can find themselves in serious conflict with the school system. Hadden (2000) argues that teachers are expected to train students to fit into the school system. Her own experience shows clearly that members’ whose agenda does not agree with that of the school can find themselves in an uncomfortable position. When she tried to encourage her students to question their learning, she was called up before the head of the school and reprimanded for threatening to undermine the school establishment. Her experience is a reminder that the harmony of the school climate depends on the collaboration of its members to mutually accept their positions within the hierarchical structure of authority.

The results of the socialization process are evident in the research literature of language classrooms. Tanner (1992) finds that students are generally comfortable with their role as passive learners. They want teachers to intervene and correct them. They do not have high opinions of teachers who leave them to their own devices. Holliday (1994) believes that the socialization process has led to the existence of a particular student culture in the ESL classroom. He goes on to explain that such a culture is formed through years of exposure to a particular type of learning script. According to him, students collaborate with their teachers because a new method presents a new and different classroom culture that makes them feel uncomfortable and strange. Cortazzi (1990) states that such a culture has largely evolved under the educational influences of the school system. This mutual acceptance of each other’s roles has helped to further maintain and establish the hierarchical nature of authority in language learning. As Drake and Miller (2001) point out, one of the key factors in the successful learning organization is collaboration.

In addition to the socialization process, one other goal of school learning, whether it is a language or content subject, is academic excellence. In language learning, academic excellence is expressed in terms of grammar knowledge and skills acquisition (Van Lier, 1997; Doughty, 1998). In accordance with Widdowson's (1990) opinion that schools are more concerned with language learning rather than language using, the view held is that for learners in school, knowledge about language forms has always been emphasized over language function. From the school's viewpoint, language is a system of linguistic forms and classroom learners can profit from the direct and explicit instruction of these forms (Richards & Rogers, 1986). This is only possible if language is viewed to be tangible and concrete.

The belief is that by acquiring the grammar, learners will naturally become proficient in using the 'correct' language to communicate. It is therefore not surprising that in many language classrooms today, teachers are still using traditional rote and drill grammar exercises where units of the language are being taught in isolation. Van Lier (1997) shows how the traditional rote learning and drill practices in the Spanish L2 classrooms in Peru were deeply entrenched within the school system. Borg (1999) argues that teachers feel most confident with explicit grammar teaching because it contains clear-cut rules that make for expository instruction. Even then, studies of ESL classrooms have shown that some of the grammar rules that learners are taught are not the actual rules of English but rules inferred incorrectly from instructional drills (Lightbown, 1983; Ellis, 1984). Insights provided by functional linguists such as Halliday (1994) indicate that in language learning, what learners encounter are not language forms or grammar but textual meanings. In other words, language is semiotic and meaning-making and once the meaning is taken away from instruction, grammar teaching becomes an abstracted, useless exercise. In essence, the perception is that structural knowledge does not automatically equate with proficient language use (Terrell, Baycroft & Perrone, 1987; Doughty & Williams, 1998).

However, there is also the increasing awareness that structural knowledge may be important to give learners competence in producing target-like forms in the L2 (Lightbown, 1983; Cloran, 2000). Swain (1992) shows that even in the richest of



contexts for language learning, full native-like ability has not been ultimately acquired in the French immersion classes in Canada because teachers have chosen to ignore teaching the language form. Thus, it appears that the argument is not about grammar teaching per se, but about the formal instruction of isolated units of the grammar in the classroom. The realization of the importance of structure has resulted in the search for better alternatives to traditional grammar instruction. It has been proposed that, in order to maximize accuracy and fluency, grammar teaching has to be incorporated into communicative activities to allow learners to practice what they have been taught (Ellis, 1992; Littlewood, 1981). Long (1999), while arguing against the teaching of isolated structural forms, is insistent that a “focus on form” (p.184) should not be abandoned. He contrasts the difference between the focus on form and traditional teaching of forms:

Whereas the content of lessons with a focus on forms is the forms themselves, a syllabus with a focus on form teaches something else – biology, mathematics, workshop practice, automobile repair, the geography of a country where the foreign language is spoken, the culture of its speakers and so on – and overtly draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication (p.184)

Here, Long is suggesting an implicit approach to drawing students’ attention to form without compromising meaning. The argument is that explicit presentation of decontextualised grammar units may result in students’ ability to work at classroom grammar exercises, but whilst not being able to apply the forms in producing meaningful texts.

The other aspect of academic excellence is the acquisition of language skills. Kramsch (1998) asserts that in schools, only the academic skills are promoted. In language learning, particularly in the ESL classroom, emphasis has traditionally been put on writing and reading. Oral fluency has not been given credit in academic discourse. She goes on to claim that the skills learnt in schools are a reflection of the “context-reduced, topic-centred” (p.56) literacy promoted in schools. It is context-reduced in the sense that the skills taught and learnt are

limited to those that are required to achieve competence within the school setting, such as the skills required to write good essays to pass the exams. Topic-centredness suggests the academically-inclined language learning topics in the school such as the reading, writing, speaking and listening exercises of academic, school-based texts. Thus, written skills are evaluated according to correct grammar and accurate spelling, while reading skills are confined to literal interpretation of texts according to the norms of interpretation expected by teachers and the school.

According to Doughty (1998), the classroom is the worst place to learn a language largely because it promotes controlled skills. Students are heavily guided in written and oral tasks, so much so that they find it difficult to transfer the skills they learn to less controlled situations. Wallace and McCoy (1992) argue that, because the skills learnt in schools are so text-based and academic orientated, they may be of little use in occupations such as novel writing or servicing industries. Novel writing, for example, requires a deeper and more critical appreciation of the language from the writer, a level of language competence that goes beyond the mere knowledge of grammar structure rules. In effect, the convergent way in which language has been learnt in schools has not prepared learners for its more divergent application when they go out into the real world. It is not difficult to see how skills required in the working place have not been traditionally imparted by the school.

A more important question that needs to be considered is the usefulness of the traditional language skills taught in schools in the age of globalisation and advancement in telecommunications. Professor Dr. Wichit Srisa-An (1998) believes that development in telecommunications and information technologies will change the communication process and therefore the language skills learnt in the classroom. He goes on to state that, with the advent of computers and the internet, e-mail and video conferencing, language acquisition has been pushed beyond the confines of the classroom. The advances made in technology have provided limitless opportunities for learners to communicate with the real world. As such, learners will need to be equipped with the appropriate skills to meet such a challenge. Kramsch (1994) suggests that the academic and literary skills

persistently valued by schools will not be able to meet the demands of the modern world.

To give an example, Pakir and Low (1995) suggest that writing skills in the English curriculum in Singapore schools have always emphasized the promotion of handwriting or penmanship. Focus is on grammatical accuracy as well as spelling, and students are taught to write in such a way as to fulfill the assessment requirements. Similarly, the Japanese high school students in Benson's (1991) study, while acknowledging that they need to improve their English conversational skills, feel that such skills take second place to those required for difficult fact-based written exams they have to pass at the end of the school year.

Indeed, the centrality of exams in the educational culture is a familiar finding in most educational studies in general, and ESL instruction in particular. According to Gorsuch (2000), exams intertwine with teachers' perceptions of their local school culture and their classroom teaching experiences. In her article on the TEFL classrooms in Japan, she finds that exams are seen as the key to the students' future success and standing in Japanese society. Students expect their teachers to help them pass exams and will even co-operate with their teachers when they are teaching for the exams. Cheah (1996) argues that the "examination is the soul of the ethos about education in East Asian societies" (p.9). Because the exam is viewed as the hidden curriculum in schools, he believes that language and literacy skills are compromised to align them to success in exams. Thus, the reading, writing, oral and listening skills in language learning have not been exploited to their full potential in formal classroom learning.

Cheng (1997) uses the term "washback" (p.38) to refer to the fact that in Hong Kong secondary schools, testing drives not only the curriculum but also teaching methods and students' approaches to learning. Furthermore, it appears that oral skills play but a small part within the overall content of instruction. Indeed, in his interviews with Hong Kong secondary school students, Wu (1991) finds that 88% claim they have no incentive to speak English in the classroom because oral skills do not feature strongly in the exams. According to Richards, Tung and Ng (1992) teachers in Hong Kong are not able to carry out communicative activities in the

English language classrooms partly because of the pressure of school and public exams and assessments.

Bernstein (1999) recognizes that pedagogic practice is one of continuous evaluation and that “evaluation condenses the meaning of the whole [pedagogic] device” (p.36). He argues that the content of a discipline has been transformed in schools for the purpose of evaluation and that the setting helps in making such transmission possible. For scholars such as Cook-Gumperz (1986) and Dyson (1992), the examination is one aspect of the socio-cultural norms of literacy practices in educational settings. As far as East Asian systems of schooling are concerned, value is placed on rote learning, imitating and literal interpretation of established texts, practices that contradict Western beliefs of creative and individualistic thinking (Cheah, 1998).

The justification for exams in schools is that they comprise an effective device for selecting and directing learners into their positions in society. In the case of language learning, however, exams may have little significance for the degree of achievement. This is the argument put forward by Wells (1999), who argues that tests and exams do not actually tell us what learners think or understand. Williams (2001) offers a new way of looking at the value of exams from the school’s viewpoint. He argues that schools review exam results in order to decide whether further investment should be put into a particular discipline or subject. So, apart from them being a criterion for achievement, poor exam results will raise questions about further developing the language programme in the school in terms of financial and personal investment.

What can be gathered from the foregoing discussion of current research literature is that features like structural knowledge, authority, skills acquisition and exams are recurrent and pervasive in language instruction. To a significant extent, they form the social and cultural norms in educational institutions (Tanner, 1989; Gumperz, 1982). By taking into account the history and traditions of school learning, these norms have evolved and become established over time to such an extent that they are taken for natural behaviour (Christie, 2000; Byrnes, 1998). If an interpretation can be made of Kramsch’s (1998) claim that culture both

“liberates” and “constricts” (p.6), then it can be said that the socio-cultural norms of school learning, and in particular language learning, set out to free learners from the randomness of natural language so that learning becomes more orderly and predictable. At the same time, they draw up boundaries by imposing those social and cultural norms based on selected principles of education.

This literature review has explored the socio-cultural theory of school learning in general, and language learning in particular. However, in the field of ESL education, there has been insufficient focus on the socio-cultural theory of formal ESL acquisition. While there have been strong indications that ESL instruction is carried out under the general umbrella of the social and cultural norms of the school, studies focusing on the extent of the socio-cultural structure in the everyday practices in ESL classrooms have so far been elusive.

### Summary

Studies in SLA have traditionally been orientated towards cognitive and psychological perspectives. The emergence of a socio-cultural theory in SLA demonstrates that language is also socially constructed and that language acquisition is dependent on the social and cultural conditions of the larger context surrounding the individual. A parallel shift has also occurred in language education. There is the emerging belief that the social dimensions of language learning must be addressed in order to further understand the L2 learning process in the classroom. From a collective review of the literature, there appear to be a number of social and cultural factors attached to school language education. These express themselves as socio-cultural norms which can be said to govern the process of instruction in school, norms pertaining to evaluation, authority, structural knowledge and skills acquisition. Although there have been inferences and implications to the effect that there is an intertwining relationship between these norms and everyday classroom practices, not much has been done to subject the conception of a socio-cultural structure to an explicit analytical study, particularly in ESL education studies.

## **Literature Review 2: The Conception of a School Socio-cultural Structure in ESL Classroom Talk**

### **2.2.0 Introduction**

From the foregoing section, the implication is that the nature of the socio-cultural structure of language instruction in the school may be made explicit from a detailed observation of the everyday practices in the language classroom. This second part of the literature review chapter attempts to further explore this idea by reviewing the research literature on one aspect of ESL classroom behaviour – classroom talk. Classroom talk here refers to the patterns of linguistic behaviour of talk-in-interaction between the teacher and students during the language lessons. There are two sections to this part of the chapter. The first section provides the rationale for using classroom talk to discuss and explore the notion of a socio-cultural structure in ESL school instruction. This is followed by the second section which consists of a review of related research literature on the significant features of verbal behaviour in the language classroom.

### **2.2.1 Classroom talk and socio-cultural structure – a rationale**

Talk is central to everyday existence. It pervades human history, and every human encounter at all levels of society and in every social context. As such, talk has traditionally been the focus of analytic attention for both linguists and sociolinguists. In a significant way, talk provides a viable avenue for looking at language from a sociological perspective. In the years since Hymes's (1964) work on the ethnography of communication and Gumperz's (1982) study of interactional sociolinguistics, a significant number of related studies have emerged which focus on speech patterns or talk sequences. According to Goffman (1983), talk acts as an indicator or expression of social and cultural structures such as gender, ethnic values, social class, relationships and the like. There has been well-documented research literature on speech patterns and their reflections of the communities in which they occur (Saville-Troike, 1982; Hudson, 1908; Labov, 1972). In sociolinguistics, it has been routinely accepted that talk by and among

actual participants in a social context is seen as a product of the social and cultural forces operating around it. In other words, there is a connection between the linguistic features of speech and the socio-cultural structure of the community in which they are situated.

In the area of examining social structures in talk, Schegloff (1993) pointed out that social structures are intertwined with the features of the organization of conversations such as turn-taking allocation and sequential repair mechanisms. For example, Wilson's (1993) analysis of conversations between the judge and the lawyers in courtrooms and the telephone conversation between a complainant and a police officer at the police station are cases in point. By looking at the sequential mechanisms such as requests made, questions asked and the like, he showed how the social structures of the courtroom and the police setting have important bearings on the way the conversation or talk is constructed. In addition, such studies demonstrate how speech patterns of ordinary conversations are transformed to accommodate the organization of a particular activity in such a way that it is recognized as a form of institutional interaction. Zimmerman and Boden (1991) discuss the relationship between institutional talk and social structure in the following way:

Consideration of the contribution of talk-in-interaction to the constitution of institutional settings (and the production of social structure) will show how this fundamental organization operates as an "enabling" mechanism for institutional modes of conduct. Extending the study of talk-in-interaction to those occasions of talk demonstrably oriented to institutional or organizational aspects of settings is a first approximation to understanding how forms of talk-in-interaction are selected, adapted and combined –in a word, configured – to reflexively produce and reproduce social structure (p.6)

The point being made here is that the norms prevailing in an institution emerge in clarity and coherence through a study of the way conversations are constructed among their members. And if Zimmerman & Boden's (1993) definition of

“structure” is taken to mean a domain of “regular, repetitive, non-random events that stand in a systematic relationship to one another”(p.5), then the talk that goes on in the language classroom could very well qualify for a socio-cultural inquiry in the formal school setting. Current literature on classroom studies has shown recurrent, methodical patterns of interaction between teachers and students in the classroom across different situations at different times. Moreover, conversational talk in specific contexts such as the classroom setting provides for observable and concrete behaviour of language in context and renders a considerable degree of accountability for an operative socio-cultural structure (Mehan, 1979; Baker 1995). In other words, classroom conversations offer a satisfactory demonstration of the existence and maintenance of the overall social and cultural structure of the way language is taught and learnt in school. Accountability is important if the social and cultural structure of a particular context is to be the focus of empirical, analytical study.

Unfortunately, development of socio-cultural perspectives of talk in the language classroom, and L2 classrooms in particular, has not been satisfactory when compared with similar work carried out on conversational talk in other contexts. Up until recently, studies on classroom talk have focussed on looking at oral behaviour as it is located within the classroom. Traditionally, in L2 and foreign language (henceforth FL) studies, the idea that there is a larger, related environment surrounding and embedding the classroom has either been taken for granted or ignored. Thus, according to Seedhouse (1995), while a lot is known about classroom oral interaction, very little is known about how its features are derived or why they occur. Recently, however, some preliminary inroads have been made to attempt to link the micro processes of L2 interaction (Van Lier, 1998; Lantolf, 2000) to the macro structure of school learning. This suggests the growing realisation that features of L2 or ESL classroom talk are not isolated units but are part of the overall structure of language instruction in the school. Perhaps it is appropriate at this juncture to provide a review of research literature on the features of oral communication in the L2 classroom.

### 2.2.2 Features of L2 classroom talk



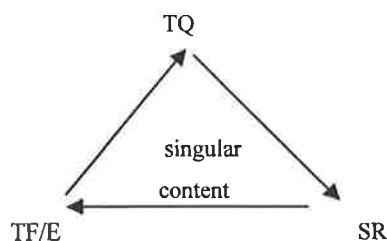
Since the emergence of L2 and FL studies, perhaps the most persistent and unmarked feature of classroom talk has been the 3-part exchange between the teacher and students (Mehan, 1979; Wu, 1991; Lai, 1992). An example of this exchange is shown thus:

Example

T        can you tell me what are the 3 parts of the description she  
             gives about this man?  
L        his character?  
T        yes, students

(extracted from Van Lier, 1988:202)

The teacher initiates the exchange by asking a question. This elicits a participatory response from the learner. The teacher then evaluates the response given. First documented and described by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), this 3-part exchange structure is usually known as the Initiation-Response-Feedback (henceforth IRF) exchange. Lemke (1990) calls this the “triadic dialogue” while Wells refer to it as the “triadic dialogue genre”. The pattern to the talk can be illustrated as shown in Fig. 2.2.1



*Fig 2.2.1 An illustration of the “triadic dialogue”*

The illustration in the figure above indicates a triangular sequence of TQ (Teacher Question) – SR (Student Response) – TF/E (Teacher Feedback/ Evaluation). The teacher starts the conversation with a question (TQ). This is followed by a student response (SR) and the teacher ends the exchange with a feedback or evaluative move before starting another sequence with a question. Moreover, the exchange

usually revolves around a singular content or message that is adhered to strictly during the interaction.

Cazden (1988) argues that by making all the initiation and feedback moves, teachers exert considerable control over what is to be learnt. Moreover, the strict allocation of turns works to constrain students to conform to a pre-determined set of teaching goals. Furthermore, most of the time, the initiation is in the form of a display question where teachers already know the answers (Long & Sato, 1983). It is recognized among classroom researchers that ESL patterns of interaction still show emphasis of form over meaning, accuracy over communication so that there are comparatively few opportunities for natural language use in the L2 classrooms (Nunan, 1987; Kumaradivelu, 1993). Wells (1999), in his analysis of the IRF exchange, finds that such talk revolves around a narrow range of content - in many instances a singular content in an entire exchange sequence - and thus has poor potential to expand talk in the target language (see Fig. 2.2.1).

Seedhouse (1996) however, points out that claims that the IRF patterns of talk in the classroom are artificial and unnatural contain serious flaws, largely because it is not possible for “conversation of non-institutional form of discourses to be produced within the classroom lesson within an institutional setting” (p.18). He goes on further to argue that the classroom pattern of interaction is a variety of the institutional discourse that corresponds to the goals of the institution. It appears that one of the goals of language instruction is evaluation: “everyone involved in language teaching and learning will readily agree that evaluation and feedback are central to the process of language learning” (Van Lier, 1989:32). Mercer (2001) believes that teachers in schools and other educational settings are expected to monitor and assess the educational progress students make and the IRF is a device particularly employed to carry out this function and as such is a legitimate way of investigating learning success. In addition, as sceptical as it may sound, students know that the language classroom is basically a training ground for language learning and that the IRF pattern of interaction is part of the “classroom game which all learners are used to” (Taylor, 1994:5). In other words, learners are aware that the communication in the classroom may not be what they will encounter in the outside world and that this is an important awareness for their understanding

of the collaboration between instructors and learners in the overall instruction objectives of the school.

The current consensual thought among researchers is that the IRF pattern of talk will most likely remain a common feature in the classroom and that, within the framework of institutional goals of language instruction, it has important pedagogical functions. The dispute, however, is about the quality of the exchange. There are relatively substantive arguments put forward that the traditional formal question and answer type of interaction per se provides students with little opportunity to use what they have learnt in creative ways (Mercer, Wegerif and Dames, 1999). What is needed is for the IRF to inherit properties that enable it to achieve other more productive goals such as the co-construction of meaning where both students and teachers can contribute their ideas and experiences in the classroom (Wells, 1999; Van Lier, 1998; Maybin, Mercer and Stierer, 1992) through the use of the target language.

It is acknowledged that the teacher plays a dominant role in classroom discourse (Barnes, 1975; Lucas, 1990; Gibson, 2001). Allwright and Bailey (1991) suggest that one significant feature of classroom interaction has been the instructional talk the teacher engages in when transmitting facts and information to learners. Chaudron (1988), in his review of teacher talk in language classrooms, reveals that the teacher controls a good proportion of talk that goes on in the classroom. As such, teachers appear to have more than half the practice in using the target language. This is found to be true, especially in ESL or EFL classrooms in Asian and Southeast Asian societies where English is not the language of wider communication outside the school setting (Martin, 1995; Baetens Beardsmore, 1995; Nunan and Bailey, 1997). In these classrooms, the teachers see their role within the school as that of transmitter of knowledge. Castillo (1998) suggests that this traditional role of the teacher is still evident in many L2 classrooms today. S/he represents the authority in terms of subject knowledge with the learner as the follower. Thus, it is natural that the teacher should assume the role of the expert who operates from the front of the class.

Moreover, it appears that the teacher's instruction has some specific characteristics. One well-observed feature is the monologic fashion of teacher instructional talk. In his article on *No Talking in Class*, Lii (in Brynes, 1998) presents the instructional role of the teacher as that of a lecturer with the students as passive listeners. Bourdieu and Passeron (1996) suggest that the "theatrical monologue" (p.109) is an efficient technique employed by teachers to distance themselves from the learners. Rogoff (1994) believes that because of his or her personal perceptions of education and status within the school community, the teacher must necessarily play a different role from that of the students in the classroom. However, Rogoff recognizes that if learning is semiotic activity with the goal of making meaning, then teaching and learning involves an essentially dialogic relationship. In other words, students should be able to have a significant part in negotiating the instructional process.

But does monologic instruction actually exclude students from acquiring competence in language learning? Apparently not, if studies in various L2 classrooms are taken into consideration. Wong-Fillmore (1985) finds that the level of student participation does not seem to influence students' performance in language tests and exams. She argues that, in fact, students who participate in classroom activities less attain better grades. Slimani (1989; 1992) discovers that low and non-participating students can often recall as much from lessons as do the high-participating students. On the other hand, Swain (1985) suggests that lack of opportunities to participate overtly in classroom talk may account for the failure of French immersion students in her study to attain native-like levels in their own speech. It would appear, then, that it all depends on how institutions define learning and thus language acquisition. If language learning is about academic knowledge and passing exams, then it does not matter whether instruction is monologic or dialogic. However, if language learning encompasses oral proficiency, then monologic instruction alone may not be adequate for acquisition to take place.

It must be noted that there are no written rules about teacher instruction that prohibit students from contributing or even interrupting the teacher. However, students generally take the passive role because of their obligation to observe the

social and cultural practices in the classroom. Breen (2001) states that students are well aware of the role identities in the classroom and that “in order to maximise learning benefits, they are obliged to jointly conspire” (p.315) with teachers to maintain a harmonious working relationship. He elaborates by suggesting that the classroom culture is often established and maintained by shared unspoken assumptions based on the co-operation between teachers and students. Takahashi’s (1989) study of the L2 classroom, for example, suggests that learners tend to be more reluctant to participate when addressing someone whom they perceive as highly competent in the second language just to show that they are learners. According to Ellis (1992), students do not wish to “rock the boat” because by doing so, classroom learning could be disrupted.

Another characteristic of teacher instructional talk has to do with the particular linguistic code employed to convey facts and information. According to Bourdieu (1991), classroom language is technical with specialised vocabularies and is far removed from natural language. He goes on to argue that teacher’s instructional talk characterizes the language of the institution and is a way of showing that s/he is in an exclusive position of access to this particular language and therefore is authorised to use it. Bourdieu and Passeron (1996) sum up the language of instruction in classrooms in two words - distinction and correctness. It is distinctly different from the language outside school and it is preoccupied with grammatical correctness. In their studies of the French language used in French classrooms, they have this to say:

academic language is a dead language for the great majority of the French people, and is no one’s mother tongue, not even that of children of the cultivated classes. As such, it is very unequally distant from the language actually spoken by the different social classes (p.8).

The same can be said for the English language. With improved communication and technology, added to the new varieties of the language found in many ESL and EFL situations and societies, it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty what constitutes “correct” or even “standard” English. It may be that the English

being promoted in schools has become obsolete and therefore irrelevant to modern societal needs. Modiano (2000) proposes that from the English as an International Language (EIL) perspective, the traditional register of classroom instruction in terms of lexical choice and grammar seems outmoded. To elaborate, he argues that traditionally teachers are regarded as models of standard and correct English language and students are expected to imitate their teachers. However, in view of English becoming a global language in the last few decades, traditional focus on correct and standard English is less likely to meet the communicative needs of students in the ESL classrooms.

When it comes to formal L2 classrooms, if language learning is to be a semiotic activity, then negotiation for meaning between teachers and students may be necessary for learning to occur. Long (1996) underlines the importance of negotiation in the target language:

... negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS [native speaker] or more competent interlocutor facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways (p.451-2).

It would appear, then, that for this kind of negotiation to happen, there must be comprehensibility of teacher input. If students are constantly struggling to understand the teacher's academic language, then negotiation will not happen, largely because you have to understand the language competently before negotiating in it.

Makitalo and Saljo (2002), however, contend that from a socio-cultural perspective, comprehensible input will not make much difference to learning. According to them, language is historically, socially and culturally generated by its surrounding context and so, while its use outside a particular setting may be incomprehensible, it makes sense to the members interacting in the situated practices within that setting. What they are suggesting is that it is not necessary for learners to recognise the linguistic forms used to gain understanding of

meaning, but that the understanding comes from it being based in a particular, shared context.

Donato and Brooks (1994) comment on the frequent occurrences of metatalk in foreign language settings and suggest that the use of technical or specialised expressions in the classroom may not act to discourage or exclude students from participating. In their studies of Spanish foreign language classrooms, they find that metalinguistic expressions are frequently found in the teacher's instruction. However, such talk appears to help students extend the discourse in new directions and sustain verbal interaction when they get into groups and try to work out their meanings among themselves. It must be noted, though, that this can happen only if students are engaged in metatalk rather than having the teacher prescribe the rules and provide explanations of metalinguistic terms and expressions.

Finally, classroom talk, especially in L2 classrooms, is found to revolve around structured activities such as grammar exercises or academic texts (Nunan, 1997; Freed, 1995; Kramsch, 1995). Long and Sato (1983) insist that the preoccupation with grammar-based talk only seeks to emphasise form over meaning, accuracy over communication. Moreover, the texts that learners in a L2 or FL classroom encounter are in many instances those that they have no knowledge or experience of. Kramsch (1995) offers a good explanation for the repeated failure to get students in the L2 and FL classes to participate actively in the target language. She points out that materials that form the basis for talk in such classes originated from the native-speaking culture and so learners are challenged to talk in "a linguistic code they have not helped to shape, in social contexts they have not helped to define" (p.90). This brings to mind the English texts and books children in Southeast Asian ESL classrooms are asked to read. Their books talk about houses with "chimneys", about "snowflakes" and "snowmen" in winter, things they do not encounter in their contexts and therefore have little experience to talk about.

It is thus not surprising that, for the second language or foreign language learner, the talk that goes on in the classroom is non-communicative and boring. In their

study of the formal instruction of L2 Russian learners, Brecht and Robinson (1995) recorded a student's perception of his language classroom:

I'm also reminded of the grammar lecture on Friday. I don't think I've ever been - I don't know. I can't remember if I've ever wanted to be in class more than I didn't want to be in class on Friday during the grammar lecture. I thought it was just infantile. It was depressing. It bums me out to no end that I paid all this money to come here, and my money has been used to put me on these excursions and sit me in these classes that I just feel like I'm getting absolutely nothing out of, just not even like the first thing. I mean, this kind of theoretical approach to grammar of the bases of the language in Russian and English, it just - I'm just not in the mood. I'm sorry, but I'm just not in the mood (OJ, 2/25/90 p.327)

This perception of the language classroom is one felt by L2 learners in many ESL classrooms today, namely that they have not benefited from language learning in any meaningful way.

Nunan (1997), however, argues that form-focussed instruction can have beneficial and language learning effects. By form-focussed instruction, he means the explicit and direct teaching of grammar-based exercises. He goes on further to claim that the effects of form-focused instruction are not only beneficial for conscious language use but in free communication as well, particularly when it is input-based, where students have to listen to and respond to sentences consisting of the target language. It may be true that form-focused or explicit grammar instruction is beneficial for language learning acquisition, even in guided and controlled communication. However, in terms of language acquisition in the sense of free communication in the target language, opportunities will be constrained by the prescriptive mode in which the grammar is taught.

This shows that perhaps the effectiveness of form-focused instruction depends on the type and quality of instruction. Freed (1995), in her study of L2 acquisition in



a study-abroad context, finds that L2 learners generally believe that formal instruction helps them in their learning. However, their main criticism is of the quality of such instruction. In other words, these learners are critical of the way the target language is being taught and learnt, but they do not question the significant value of having such classes. Ellis (1992) confirms the need to incorporate grammar teaching in L2 classrooms. However, there is still some distance to go with regard to finding the most effective way to present grammar instruction in the classroom that can help learners achieve proficient acquisition in the target language.

From the discussion in this chapter, there appears to be a system to oral behaviour in the L2 or FL pedagogy. In particular, the review provides glimpses of how classroom talk is enmeshed within the overall socio-cultural dimension of language pedagogy in the educational setting. However, currently, L2 researchers are still some distance away from developing effective studies that provide for explicit and direct exploration of this particular aspect of formal classroom language learning.

### Summary

Traditionally, linguists have always been particularly fascinated with situated practices of talk as a way to express the social and cultural norms of a particular community. It is thought that a study of speech patterns or conversations in specific contexts will provide a viable avenue to looking at language from a sociolinguistic perspective. In language education, however, studies of classroom talk, especially in L2 or FL situations, have been confined to describing the kinds of talk. Thus, a lot is known about the features of classroom oral communication, but less is known about how these features are derived or why they occur. Current research studies show that significant features occur and recur in language lessons across a variety of L2 classroom situations, such as the well-documented IRF exchange structure of classroom conversations between teachers and students, the distinct type of academic instructional talk employed by teachers and the form/text-focused talk revolving round highly structured activities and exercises. These studies, however, offer glimpses of a socio-cultural structure in L2 formal

instruction that systematizes the oral behaviour of teachers and students in the classroom, a structure that has not been subjected to thorough, detailed exploration. It is this gap in the research literature that this study will attempt to fill.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology used in conducting this research. It reviews the approach as employed and the methods used to collect and analyse the data in this exploratory-interpretative study. The first part looks at the approach and methods undertaken in the collection of data. The second part takes a look at the context under study, including the criteria for selection of the site for the study. The third part provides a framework for analysing the data gathered during the research period. Following from this will be the final part of the chapter which details my personal thoughts on the methodology of data collection and analysis for this research study, incorporating the strengths and problems encountered when obtaining and analysing the data.

#### 3.1 Review of the methodological approach to collection of data

The consideration behind the methodology employed in the collection of data for this research study is based on the three guiding research questions set out at the beginning:

- (i) What are the socio-cultural elements that make up the structure of formal ESL instruction at the secondary school level?
- (ii) What are the significant features of classroom talk during the English language class?
- (iii) To what extent is the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction expressed and realized in the features of classroom talk?

It is thought that the most appropriate and efficient methods of data collection will be through the employment of an ethnographic approach.

### 3.2 Defining ethnography in this study

In a significant way, the methodology of the research study is influenced by the ethnographic studies of classroom behaviour and interaction by Seedhouse (1995) and Van Lier (1996). Seedhouse, in his analysis of communication in the ESL classroom, demonstrated that, due to the complexity of classroom behaviour, a reliable and worthwhile analysis must include the perspectives of the participants engaged in the activity, that is, the teachers and students. Van Lier has looked at the Spanish L2 classroom in Puno within the bilingual school system and has drawn his conclusions by relating the classroom behaviour to the larger educational system prevalent during that time. These two studies are particularly significant in two ways, the first being that it is not possible to look at classroom behaviour per se to understand formal L2 acquisition. By isolating a classroom from its larger context, it is not only superficial, but can also often be misleading. Second, the complex and intriguing nature of a larger educational context such as the school can only be effectively studied in depth through a methodology that yields qualitative analysis. Thus, to get a deeper understanding of why classrooms behave as they do, there is a need to explore, probe and be immersed in the behaviour of factors influential in schools.

More precisely, the methodological approach employed in this study is driven by Grotjahn's (1987) exploratory-interpretative methodological paradigm and Bailey's (1998) naturalistic inquiry approach using a combination of qualitative data and interpretative analysis.

From readings on ethnographic studies carried out by researchers in the social sciences, anthropology and, more recently, education (Hammersley, 1994; Metz, 2000; Troike 1982; Watson-Gegeo, 1988), it is possible to come to a better understanding of what ethnography is and the features that particularise the ethnographic approach from other types of methodology in research.

According to Hammersley (1994) and Metz (2000), the data in an ethnographic study are gathered from a range of sources in natural settings and real world contexts. Moreover, data collection is unstructured in the sense that there are no

pre-determined categories to begin with and the study frequently focuses on a single setting. Analysis of data involves interpretation of meanings and intentions of human behaviour and actions. For Watson-Gegeo (1988), an ethnographic approach offers an exploratory-interpretative account of what people do in a setting, the consequences of their behaviours and the way they understand what they are doing. Ethnographic studies present a holistic picture in the sense that an aspect of behaviour is described and explained in connection to the whole system of which it is a part (Van Lier, 1988).

The range of methods used in ethnographic work in this study is determined by two main considerations. One is the kind of data that would be considered relevant to answering the guiding research questions. In this instance, the data comes from (i) interaction in the ESL classroom and (ii) the interviews with the different member groups within the school community. The conception of ethnography the study takes follows from these considerations. According to Van Lier (1989), conceptions of ethnographic work range from its original source in anthropology to its widening application in more diverse fields, such as education. This study takes the view of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), which is illustrated on a continuum conceptualised in Van Lier (1988). Here, the ethnographic methodological framework has over the years been gradually recognised to be a significant tool employed in language education studies to explore the natural behaviours of highly organised and intricate communities such as the school setting. Furthermore, such ethnographic studies have demonstrated their potential to raising important questions, recommendations and suggestions concerning the learning of a language.

### 3.3 Why an ethnographic approach?

When Donnelly (2000) carries out her study of school ethos in an attempt to understand the values of school teaching and learning in England, she adopts the ethnographic approach to data collection. She finds that the unstructured interviews she conducts with school teachers and principals are significant for gauging the values and views of school members in relation to school climate. Thus, in a parallel way, the present study is an intense probe and analysis of the

social and cultural norms prevailing in the school setting through observational study of talk that goes on in the ESL classroom.

There are many significant reasons why an ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis is desirable and appropriate. One of the most important justifications for adopting the ethnographic approach is that it presents opportunities for gaining in-depth insights into the intricacies of the school setting. To quote Whyte (1955):

As I sat and listened I learned the answers to questions that I would not even have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interview basis... when I established my position on the street corner, the data came to me without very active efforts (p.303)

Although the topic for this study differs considerably from Whyte, the conception of data collection is similar – obtaining data from naturally-occurring situations without having to resort exclusively to manipulative means.

By gathering data from various sources in natural, informal settings, opportunities exist for the provision of an exploratory-interpretative account of what people do in a setting, the outcomes of their behaviour and the way they understand what they do. This, according to Watson-Gegeo (1988), presents a holistic picture of one aspect of behaviour (in the classroom) in relation to the whole system (school) of which it is a part.

Another justification, supported by Hammersley (1994) and more recently Metz (2000), for the use of ethnographic methods and qualitative analysis of data is that the study focuses on a single setting, that is a co-educational English-medium secondary school and that the data comes from the “real world.” Moreover, interpretation takes into account the perspectives of participants so as to “equalise power” (Hammond, 2000:44) between the researcher and participants. The aim is

to further clarify observations and therefore present an accurate picture of what is going on.

Woods (1986) gives a substantive argument for more ethnographic work in education research. He argues that there has been an unhappy barrier between teachers and research because teachers feel that much of education research is irrelevant. He makes a significant statement that very often the views of teachers are not sought and research has therefore failed to connect links between theory and practice. What is needed is a move to “close the gulf between researcher and teacher, education research and education practice, theory and practice” (Woods, 1986:4). One way in which this study attempts to close the gap between researcher and participants is to involve them in the research by getting them to express their viewpoints and talk about what they are doing in the classroom and in school.

However, like all other approaches, there are certain weaknesses of the ethnographic study. First, there is the problem of generalisation, at least from the quantitative researcher’s viewpoint. The general argument is that findings generated in one context may not represent a larger group. This study, however, is not intended to be generalised. The purpose is to gain a more complete understanding of a phenomenon, that is, the social and cultural beliefs and values of a group of people in a specific community about the way the L2 is taught and learnt in that community. Moreover, as Guba and Lincoln (1989) point out, it is the receiver (not the researcher) who will ultimately decide whether results can be applied to another situation.

This brings us to the next potential drawback, and that is the small sample size. How can definitive findings and conclusions be made with such a small sample size? In fact, the quality of this study is not dependent on size. It is intended to watch for patterns in the data collected. It is concerned with the richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical skills of the researcher. Furthermore, it appears that sample size has little to do with the quality or reliability of a study, whether quantitative or qualitative in its approach to methodology. Patton (1990) offers an example about Piaget contributing a major breakthrough in how children learn through a close study of one child. Piaget’s

findings have been considered to be reliable and valid despite involving the analysis of only one child. His findings are considered significant, not because of the sample size nor its quantitative nature, but because of the rigorous and detailed way he has gone about his analysis.

### 3.4 Selection of research sites for the study

The purpose of the study is to examine the socio-cultural structure of formal ESL instruction in an ESL situation. As such, the site selection for the research is based on a list of criteria with the intention of fulfilling the purpose of the study. This is presented in Table 3.1.

The table shows the main considerations behind the selection of the research sites that would best address the research questions for the study, all of which apply to the actual research site chosen. Thus, the country chosen for the study has English as an important second language with this language featuring strongly within the overall structural framework of the economy, reflecting the desire to participate actively in the age of globalisation and improved communications. There is also a formal bilingual system of education with English as a second language, influenced to some extent by past or present colonial ties with a native English speaking country, in this case the United Kingdom.



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Criteria	
Country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiethnic and multiracial population</li> <li>English functions as an important second language</li> <li>Has a bilingual education system with English as a second language</li> <li>Has ties, present or past, with an English speaking colonial power</li> <li>Takes an increasingly bigger role in globalisation and improved technology</li> </ul>
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-established educational institution within the country</li> <li>Urban setting</li> <li>Caters for secondary school education</li> <li>Multiethnic and multiracial student population</li> <li>Local students as majority with the rest coming from surrounding ESL societies</li> <li>Students from non-English speaking backgrounds</li> </ul>
Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English language classroom</li> <li>Secondary 2 to 5</li> <li>Academically heterogeneous grouping</li> <li>Multiethnic and multiracial population</li> </ul>
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adheres to English language instruction guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education</li> <li>Emphasises academic excellence</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiethnic and multiracial</li> <li>Non-native English speaking background</li> <li>Has extensive teaching experience in the English language</li> </ul>

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*Table 3.1 Criteria for selection of research sites for the study*

The actual research study focuses on one school set in the capital city with a long-established tradition in ESL instruction. The school caters for secondary education from secondary classes 2 to 5 with students from different ethnic and racial groups. Over half of the student population is local with the rest coming from the surrounding societies. Most of the students come from non-English speaking backgrounds where the highest exposure to communication in English is in the language classroom.

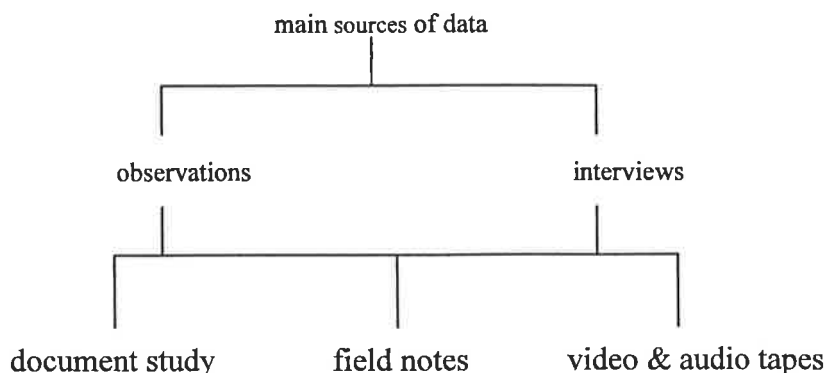
The English classrooms under observation are the secondary classes with a heterogeneous class population in the sense that students (i) have differing abilities in the target language and (ii) come from different ethnic and racial groups. In other words, focus is on average ability classes on the basis that such classrooms will reflect more naturally the everyday classroom practices.

The curriculum for English language instruction adopted by the school is one that adheres to the guidelines set out by the national Ministry of Education in terms of syllabus and assessment. In particular, it is a school that seeks to follow these guidelines in ways that promote academic excellence in ESL instruction.

The teachers are multiethnic and multiracial from countries where English is not a native or first language. In other words, these are non-native speaking English teachers. They, however, have quite extensive (between 3 to 25 years) experience in teaching English to ESL learners in secondary classrooms. These are teachers who have accumulated definite teaching strategies over the years which they claim have helped them teach the subject successfully in formal educational institutions. A more detailed and thorough look at the context and research site will be provided in the next chapter.

### 3.5 Sources of data collection

Two main methods of data collection have been employed in this study. These are supported by three other supporting methods of data collection. They can be illustrated as follows:



### 3.5.1 Observations

One of the major sources of data collection in this study comes from “open” or unstructured observations. This means that there is no manipulation or control exerted by the observer on proceedings, the aim being to yield as much genuine data as possible. In particular, observations are made in two areas – (i) the physical constructs and events of the school, such as in the library, teacher’s room, or office and during assemblies and (ii) classroom interaction during the English lessons.

Furthermore, most of the observations carried out can be described as participant observations in the tradition of documented ethnographic works of Saville Troike (1982), Guthrie (1989) and Schumann & Schumann (1977). It is understood that participant observations may be a constraining factor in attempts to yield natural, genuine data. It has been argued that the presence of an “outsider” in any context will inevitably affect the behaviour of its members and therefore threaten the “naturalness” of behaviour. As Luttrell (2000) rightfully points out, the mere presence of an observer indicates that he/she is already involved in what is happening. What is important is that an admission of this involvement be noted within the methodology in order to arrive at realistic and frank findings and results. In fact, this study has employed a combination of covert (participant-as-observer) and overt (observer-as-participant) observations. Thus, while the observer participates just by being present during the activities, there are other times when the observer participates in the activity, for example during focus group interviews with the students. Moreover, the observations are not dissimilar in some ways to Bailey (1983) where, added to participant observations, are concurrent field notes kept by the observer, who records actual activities and the impressions and experiences of all involved in these activities.

According to Spindler and Hammond (2000) participant observations can, over time, lessen the anxiety of subjects under study and therefore help in doing a good ethnographic study. This appears to be the case in this study. A considerable amount of time has been spent with teachers and students both inside and outside the classroom, before and after observations, talking about what has been learnt

and taught and their experiences. The purpose is to get the insiders' perspectives on the what and why of language learning in a complex setting.

Seedhouse (1995) argues that for any accurate, satisfying description, analysis and evaluation of the L2 classroom interaction to be made, the methodology must take into consideration the relationship between the unique characteristics of classroom interaction and the pedagogical purposes of that interaction. This will involve looking at the social and cultural norms of L2 instruction at the institutional level. Thus, the methodology employed in this study attempts to avoid the pitfalls of an inadequate analysis of classroom communication. Wherever possible, the participants' perspectives and viewpoints have been sought and incorporated into the interpretation of data collected. This is what Shimanof (1980:73) calls the "Research's Versus Actors' Interpretation" or triangulation. Triangulation permits the observer's perspectives to converge with the participants' perspectives.

### 3.5.2 The strengths and limitations of observations

It is, however, important that the strengths and limitations of observations in research work be acknowledged and appreciated. Swann (1994 in Graddol, Maybin and Stierer) pointed out that by virtue of being present in a situation and watching what is going on, one is likely to some extent to become a participant and therefore likely to affect the interaction taking place. Labov (1970) calls this the "observer's paradox", a term that is used to explain the fact that the interpretation of events and situations may be "coloured" or distorted by the observer's viewpoints and opinions. The end result is that the observer's rather than the participants' interpretation is expressed. It may be an unconscious act by the observer, but without incorporating the "insider's" viewpoints and interpretation of observations, misrepresentation of findings may occur. One way of reducing this limitation is to obtain, wherever possible, the insider's or participants' interpretation of their actions.

On the other hand, even the insider's interpretation can be confusing and ambiguous. There are times during the research period when I find it difficult to

match what the participants say they do and what they actually do. When asked to clarify, they often persist in claiming what they know to be untrue simply because they want to be in the “good books” of the observer or school. Another way of reducing the problem of the “observer’s paradox” is to spend a considerable amount of time with the participants in getting them to gradually accept the observer’s presence. Spindler & Hammond (2000), in their ethnographic study of a third grade class in Germany, make themselves familiar and non-threatening to the children and teachers by spending social time with them, having breaks with them and joking with them. They admit that it was not easy but it improved the quality of their ethnography in the classroom and outside of it. More importantly, by being involved in the situation under study, it became that much easier to think and interpret behaviour.

Seliger and Shohany (1995) have argued that “unstructured”, open observations are especially susceptible to the subjective bias of the observer. They claim that, while field notes and impressions do provide records, a huge burden is placed on the observer to record accurately what is being observed. In an attempt to reduce this problem, data collected in this study comes from various sources, involving, for example, checking the observer’s interpretations with participants, and the use of written documents to get the insiders’ views of events. Often, video and audio recordings are used to validate transcriptions. Through data triangulation, a good effort is made to arrive at more reliable and valid conclusions.

One key to successful participant observation is to detach oneself as much as possible from one’s own cultural beliefs and experiences (Troike, 1982) in order to adopt a detached and objective attitude in perceiving things around us. I have found, however, that in practice, it may not be an easy feat to accomplish. The observer will always be pulled every which way by the tensions and contradictions faced. Luttrell (2000) shares a good alternative method to overcome the inherent shortcomings in ethnographic studies. She suggests that, rather than try to eliminate the problems, it would be easier to acknowledge them explicitly in the study. Natasha and Andrea Doucet (1997:138) put it succinctly:

The best we can do then is to trace and document our data analysis processes, and the choices and decisions we make, so that other researchers and interested parties can see for themselves some of what has been lost and some of what has been gained. We need to document these reflective processes, not just in general terms such as our class, gender and ethnic background; but in a more concrete and nitty-gritty way in terms of where, how and why particular decisions are made at particular stages.

This I have tried to do throughout the collection and analysis stages in this study. I note down the stages of my data collection and analysis as I go along, incorporating my thought processes during these stages. I then document all of these within the methodological framework so that readers and other researchers can see for themselves the strengths and limitations of the study.

Weighed against the limitations, the strengths of observation as a method of data collection, particularly in this study, must be appreciated. Intensive and detailed observations of particular behaviours in a setting over a considerable period of time has always been the unique feature of ethnography. In this study, the observations of the classroom and other areas of the school may provide significant insights and valuable information about how English as a subject is taught and learnt in the everyday classroom situation.

Moreover, a trusting relationship can develop as participants recognise that the research does contribute in some way towards what they do. Before conducting the actual research, I met with the administrators and English language teachers to give a brief outline of my research, what I was observing and the purpose/s behind it. I made it clear that the study does not seek to make judgements about the way the English subject is being taught and learnt, but is an attempt to understand the learning and teaching processes in the school. It was difficult for them to appreciate their contribution to the research at the beginning, but as time went on, teachers and students became curious and wanted to know more about my study. I had frequent questions from them and in return was offered some relevant and important information. Furthermore, I think that my teaching experience within

the school setting has enabled me to reach a good and sensitive understanding of the prevailing culture in schools within such a context.

### 3.5.3 Interviews

Apart from observations, interviews are conducted at different times during the research period with different members of the school community. The interview settings range from the formal (the principal's office) to the informal (the teacher's room, classroom). The interview methods are based and adapted from readings on interviews carried out in various language and education studies (Donnelly, 2000; Saville Troike, 1982; O'Malley et al, 1985). Two types of interviews are carried out in this research study: the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews.

It has been suggested that one of the main features of ethnography is its openness (Spindler & Hammond, 2000) characterised by the use of unstructured interviews that allow interviewees to share their viewpoints freely. However, it is felt that semi-structured interviews are more appropriate for this study because, although it is ethnographic in nature in terms of data collection, it is to a certain extent driven by guiding questions which need to be addressed. So, a choice had to be made whereby interviews allow for expansion and elaboration within limits but are centred around specific core issues determined in advance by the interviewer (Bernard, 1988; Fowler, 1988).

According to Woods (1986), interviews frequently termed "unstructured" are not completely so. There will be issues or areas of the research an interviewer wishes to cover. Moreover, interviewees may need some guidance in what to talk about. For this study, therefore, an interview schedule is used to prompt the interview into the areas to be discussed.

Another form of interview used is verbal reporting which is similar in some ways to that used by Cohen and Hosenfield (1981), Mann (1983) and Lennon (1989). Teachers and students are frequently asked, as soon as each class observation is completed, to evaluate the lesson. Since it was thought that it would be easier for

them to talk about the situation with the information still fresh in their minds. Whenever possible, they are shown the video of the lesson and then invited to comment on significant behaviours and occurrences. Comments are then recorded as field notes. The retrospective verbal reports are an important way to get the insider's perspective on the interactional event that has just occurred. As supporting tools of analysis, their value cannot be under-emphasised, as they help to clarify and justify ambiguities in the data, thus providing for more balanced and objective findings.

#### 3.5.4 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews are relatively new in L2 research (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). As the term suggests, they are group interviews. A moderator or interviewer guides the interview, while a small group discusses the topics that the interviewer raises. The participants' input during these discussions form the essential data.

In this study, five students from three participant classes at the secondary level are selected to take part in such interviews. Initially, these interviews were intended to be on a voluntary basis in the sense that only students who wanted to take part were to be included. However, in reality, apart from one or two volunteers, the rest were reluctant to offer to take part. So, the teachers had to select certain students from their classes to participate in the interviews. Those selected were, however, free to reject participation if they wished. In the end, all those who had been selected participated and contributed tremendously during the group interviews. As the interviewer and leader of the discussion, I work from a pre-determined set of discussion topics. Discussion of topics is "open", which allows students to express opinions freely about a topic, whilst focusing on areas of interest in the study.

It is felt that focus group interviews are particularly suitable for students for a number of reasons. Each student may have individual and different perceptions and thus bringing them together allows them to share and compare different ideas



and viewpoints. Moreover, focus group interviews allow students to freely discuss their views collectively, providing useful insights into what matters most to them.

For me as the interviewer, it is an opportunity to get the students' perspectives on the questions and issues under study. The focus group interviews have been particularly suitable for looking into complex issues such as classroom behaviour. The discussions have helped me hear the questions that participants want to ask and they present excellent opportunities to discover viewpoints that I never knew existed.

Krueger & Morgan (1998) suggest that focus group interviews are especially useful for exploring and discovering groups of people who are poorly understood. In this instance, they are employed to find out students' perceptions of what they do in the classroom within the larger school context. Other researchers who use focus group interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990) believe that such guided interviews can generate rich data on participants' experiences and beliefs. For this reason, they are particularly suited to qualitative research methods.

#### 3.5.5 The strengths and weaknesses of interviews

One of the major problems acknowledged with interviews is the subjectivity of opinions. Luttrell (2000) pointed out that, because researchers are so close and familiar with the study, their judgement will invariably be affected. Results tend to be influenced by personal judgement and opinions. To reduce the problem and present a more accurate reflection of the participants' views, accepted systematic procedures for data collection have been employed. The interviews are supported by field notes, video and audio tapes in order to capture comments which are later reviewed and incorporated into the analysis process. Transcripts of interviews have also been given to the respective interviewees to read, with the opportunity to discuss areas of ambiguity or misrepresentation.

There are also arguments, particularly from quantitative researchers, that the use of interviews as a method of data collection is inherently unreliable and invalid.

They maintain that during interviews, participants may lie or distort the truth or decide not to give important information. Researchers can therefore be misled by incomplete, inaccurate or biased data (Becker, 1970). Steps have therefore been taken in this study to ensure validity and reliability through multiple data collection methods – direct observations, interviews and document study. Thus, bias is reduced somewhat by increasing the richness of information available to the researcher. It would seem appropriate to review the supporting methods of data collection used in this study at this point.

#### 3.5.6 Supporting methods of data collection

The data from all observations and interviews carried out are supported by three other sources: document study, field notes and video/audio tapes. These supporting data sources are important as they add to the richness of the information of the overall data and contribute towards a reliable and valid analysis.

#### 3.5.7 Document study

Additional data are gathered from textbooks, student work, teacher record books, school policy documents, assessment and exam papers and so forth (see Appendices 4-9). These have helped to expand and further clarify the overall database. In their research study, Spindler and Hammond (2000) have tried to collect everything and anything people are willing to part with in the school. They find that, although they end up not using much of what has been collected, enough is used and in significant ways that render the collection to be worthwhile. According to Sherman and Webb (1988) documents can be very valuable in reviewing and checking on data gathered by other methods.

The use of documents to support observations and interviews is not new. They have been used since the 1970s and 1980s in education research (Conrad, 1978; Reynolds, 1976; Measor & Woods, 1984). Scarth (1985), for example, has uncovered a great deal about his school's ethos from the official documents. He

has found that emphasis is given to examination and subject knowledge while other areas of the curriculum receive much less attention.

#### 3.5.8 Field notes

Apart from collecting documents, field notes are kept throughout the research period. Field notes are the observer's records of observations made. In particular, they contain descriptions of the participants, the setting and the event. They are also attempts at recapitulating conversations and other interactions with different people within the school community.

Furthermore, the study has utilised the two aspects of field notes noted by Krathwohl (1994). One is to record the facts as accurately as possible. This includes a chronological account of an observation, the stages of an English lesson, for example. The field notes may also include diagrams and illustrations of the situation showing, for example, the relative position of the participants, classroom arrangement and so forth. This is important because factual descriptions make it easier for the researcher to later make an objective selection of what is significant for the purpose of the study.

The other aspect is a written account of the observer's reflections and impressions (Lofland, 1971). One reason for doing this is because, as a participant in the events, the observer is both a researcher and a subject. Thus, impressions contribute data in their own right. The other reason is that it enables the researcher to analyse her reactions for possible bias, which is then incorporated in the analysis of the data. Both aspects are kept separate to isolate opinions from facts.

The significance of field notes cannot be over-emphasised. Miles & Huberman (1984) note that sometimes we become overwhelmed with all the information present in research that we 'forget to think, to make deeper and more general sense of what is happening, to begin to explain it in a conceptually coherent way' (p.69). In many ways, field notes allow us to do that.

#### 3.5.9 Video & audio tapes

Observations and interviews carried out throughout the research period are also supported, whenever possible, by video and audio tapes. Video and audio taping are frequently carried out simultaneously because some microphones of video cameras may not be sensitive enough to record clearly the verbal interaction, especially in classrooms where student voices are often found to be too soft for the microphone to pick up what is being said.

Video and audio tapes have been used extensively in the field of social research (Bloom, 1954; Kagan, Krathwohl & Miller, 1963; Farquhar, 1965). They allow for replaying, stopping at various points for clarification and review. Frequently, they were used to ask participants to reflect on what happened at various stages of the interaction and why it happened, a task in which students especially were only too happy to oblige. Upon reflection, the students, more than teachers and administrators, were most enthusiastic about being video taped. They were always asking to see the video tapes of their lessons and interviews and were always spontaneous in their comments about what happened. I have found that such tapes do stimulate participants into reporting both the situation and their feelings as though they are reliving those moments. During data analysis, video tapes have been particularly valuable. They help to review, confirm and clarify the accuracy of certain findings.

Having described the methodology employed in this study, I will discuss the procedures of my data collection in the next section.

### 3.6 Data collection procedures

The research was conducted in an English-medium secondary school in Brunei. prior to the actual research, a letter, together with a copy of the research outline was faxed from the university to the school to obtain permission for research to be carried out in the school (see Appendix 1). To obtain the data in this study, I have collected documents, made field notes, observed the English language classrooms and conducted interviews. In the following section, I will discuss the data collection procedures and the techniques used to collect the data.

### 3.6.1 Classroom Observations

Observations, particularly classroom observations, are one of the two primary sources of data collection in this study. I managed to obtain permission from the principal to observe the secondary classrooms during English lessons. Arrangements were made to talk about the research with the administration and English language teachers. My initial request to observe the F5 classes was discouraged, because the students were having their “O” level oral exams then. These continue for about a month, followed by revision lessons, which according to the Head of the English Department would not result in fruitful observations.

So arrangements were made for me to observe three classes, a lower secondary class (F2) and two upper secondary classes (F4), one of which is an Arts class and the other a Science class. Permission was then sought and obtained from the two teachers teaching English in these classes to have their lessons observed and for them to become active participants in the research. Both teachers, together with the Head of the English Department were briefed on the general purpose of the study and the aims of the observations and interviews.

Altogether, I have made eighteen classroom observations during the English language lessons. The average number of students per class is thirty-eight. The observations consist of 35-minute periods and 70-minute block periods. Observations were carried out two or three times per week. I usually discussed with the teacher at the beginning of the week when I would be coming in and she then briefed me on the topic of the lesson to be observed. A review of the lesson notes showed that the teachers divided up their language teaching into discrete components – Grammar, Comprehension, Composition and Vocabulary. So Monday might be grammar, Tuesday might be reading comprehension and so on. I arranged my observations in such a way that all the different components are represented. I found that the teachers prefer it if I let them know beforehand when I would be coming to observe their classes because they liked to be fully prepared for the observations. Gradually, however, they became more relaxed and I was able to sit in without prior notice.

I further sought and obtained permission from the somewhat reluctant teachers to use video and audio tapes during observations. They seemed to accept it more readily when I told them why I needed to tape their lessons. As a result, fifteen of the eighteen lessons observed have been both video and audio taped. The video recordings were carried out with a Sony camcorder on a tripod stand and usually last a full lesson. The recorder was placed in the centre of the classroom towards the front and frequently panned around the classroom to capture all aspects of the classroom and interaction. Sometimes, I engaged the students sitting in the front rows into helping me pan the recorder around the classroom once in a while, a task most were only too eager to do.

I used a field recorder for audio-taping, the type that works with microphones and is powerful enough to catch the sounds made around the classroom quite effectively. The field recorder was placed on the teacher's desk at the front of the class with one microphone placed on her desk and the other placed on the desk of a student sitting further back. It was arranged in such a way as to fully take in the talk that goes on in the classroom. Even then, I did experience some difficulty during transcribing. Students' voices are frequently muffled and inaudible. Initially, the set-up seemed quite intrusive with wires trailing all over the classroom, but as time went on, the students and teachers became more comfortable with the intrusion. Setting up these equipment did take some time at first but it became easier after the first few observations.

During observations, I sat at the back of the classroom, usually in a corner in an attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible. I used a notebook to jot down notes during the lesson. I divided up my notes into three columns: - 'Teacher' for what the teacher did; 'Students' for what the students did in response and 'Remarks' for my own reflections and impressions. I recorded the stages of each lesson in chronological order. Sometimes, I talked to the students, especially during written work to gauge their perceptions of the lesson.

Occasionally, I wrote down questions about certain behaviours that I did not understand, to be brought up with the teacher immediately after the lesson. Getting hold of the teachers immediately after the lesson was not always easy

because they often had to go straight to teach another class. I often had to wait for a free period or break for their evaluation of what had transpired in the classroom during the observations. Both teachers were very tolerant and patient and spent a considerable amount of time with me talking about the classes they teach, their thoughts about students generally, and language teaching and learning in particular. I also carried out a number of conversations with other teachers in the teacher's room. These conversations were committed to memory and recorded at the end of each day during a quiet time of reflection. I tried not to write anything in front of them as they might not like the idea of being quoted.

I intended to get students involved as much as possible in the evaluation of the lessons observed. Though such opportunities have been quite difficult due to the students' schedules, sometimes I managed to talk to students before class observations and during break immediately after the observations to find out what they had to say about the lesson or about features I did not quite understand during observations. Apart from a few students who were too shy to talk about what they felt, I found that students, as a whole, were generally accommodating. After some time, they became quite used to having me around and then they started to open up more. Sometimes, they would even stop me during break and offer information about what happened during class that day. I tried to write down these conversations with the students immediately after each encounter.

### 3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

Apart from classroom observations, I have also carried out interviews with the principal, the two teachers involved in the study, the English Head of Department and the students of the classes I observed. Initially, I intended to carry out a total of nine interviews: three with the principal, one with each of the three English language teachers and three with groups of students from the classes I had been observing. However, due to their busy schedules, I was only able to carry out two interviews with the principal, two interviews with each of the teachers and one focus group interview with each of the three sets of students.

I set out interview guides beforehand to provide some sort of direction to the interviews. The questions are semi-structured in the sense that they allow for elaboration and discussion yet are focused on topics that I think will be of significant interest to the guiding questions behind the study. However, I find myself having to add on questions along the way about some recurring observations I have not thought of before the actual research process.

Each interview schedule has about six questions covering about three or four topics of interest (see Appendix 2). Different questions are put to each group of interviewees, but based on similar topics. So the questions put to the principal will be quite different from those I put to teachers, which in turn will be quite different from those posed to students. All questions are however, closely related in terms of fields of focus. All the questions, for example, cover the topics of student participation, goals of learning English and so forth. This will help consolidate the overall findings in the final analysis. The interviews were spaced out over six weeks, with the first interview carried out in the second week and the last interview in the fifth week. The first interview was a teacher interview as I felt that the teachers would be quite comfortable to talk with me by then. I did not start with the student focus group interviews until after the third week as I felt that the students needed more time to open up to a stranger

Each teacher was interviewed twice, individually, once soon after the first classroom observations and once near the end of the research period. All the interviews were held in school during their free periods. We used an empty classroom and the library because it was quieter there and also made taping more effective. Each interview lasted about forty minutes. Although the teachers were willing to be interviewed, they did not like the idea of me taping the interviews since it made them uncomfortable. It was not until I pointed out the reason for the taping (to transcribe the discussion for research purposes) that they agreed to be audio taped, but not video taped. One teacher was afraid I might use the information to show the school authorities and kept on asking if what was being said would be treated in strict confidence. However, when they realised later that I was not about to divulge any secrets, they became more enthusiastic and even talked to me freely about how they felt about certain issues without my asking.



I also conducted a total of two interviews with the principal in his office, once in the third week and once in the sixth week. We worked out a time convenient to him as he was very busy with meetings and activities both in school and at the ministry. He was very supportive and patient during the interviews, although he was hesitant about being taped and agreed to this only if it would help me in my research and not for other purposes. He did not want to be video taped. Each interview lasted about fifty minutes. Both the principal and the teachers were given a copy of the discussion questions prior to the first interview so that they had an idea of what would be asked. They were however, not given a copy of subsequent interviews before-hand because of the constant restructuring and additions or omissions I had to make to questions as a result of further observations.

Each teacher and principal interview was recorded and transcribed immediately after each encounter. I gave them a copy of the interview to read through for further comments and clarifications. Generally, they were quite impressed with the accuracy of the transcriptions and made few amendments. The principal deleted some of his comments in the transcriptions because he regarded them as sensitive, while the teachers mostly corrected their spoken language and rephrased a few comments. I then collected the amended copies from them to incorporate into my data analysis.

Three student group interviews were held in the fourth, fifth and sixth weeks with a group of 5 students in each session. Five students from each of the three classes under observation took part in the interviews. Some of the students volunteered to take part, whilst others were selected by their English teachers based on their gregarious personality. The teachers felt that such students would be able to express freely their viewpoints and opinions. Permission was obtained from the teachers to hold these interviews during one of their English classes. Each interview lasted about forty minutes and was held in the research and resource room in the school. Prior to the interviews, I met with each group of students and gave them a briefing about the nature of the interview and its general purpose. By then, the students were quite used to having an observer around and were ready to participate.

Just before each interview, I again told the students how the interview would be conducted and that they were free to talk and ask if they did not understand any of the questions. The students were very enthusiastic and spontaneous. Every group readily agreed to be taped. So, both video and audio recordings were made. Some were a little shy to start with, but when discussions warmed up, they were able to express what really mattered to them. There were occasions when they were talking on top of one another, so now and again I had to ask for their viewpoints individually which helped to draw out the opinions of more reticent students.

Unlike with the principal and teacher interviews, the students were not given the interview schedules beforehand. Neither were they given copies of the transcriptions after the interviews to read through. It was thought that giving them the interview guide beforehand might somehow affect the genuineness of the interviews and, as it would be quite difficult for them to recall their exact contributions during the discussion, would be pointless to give them copies of the transcriptions after the interviews.

### 3.6.3 Document study

I also managed to get hold of whatever documents I could lay my hands on during my time in the school. Permission was obtained from various parties to collect whatever documents I might need to help provide a clearer, more coherent framework for the study. From the teachers, I managed to collect copies of their lesson notes for the week, their written scheme of work for the whole year, the language syllabus for the different levels they teach and copies of chapters taken from the textbooks they were using at the time

From the general office I collected the school academic calendar for the year. During the first week, I also managed to collect copies of the school documents from the office and the school calendar, scheme of work and syllabus from the teacher's record books. With the permission of the principal, I was able to obtain the English assessment papers, mock exam papers and the national public (PMB) and external G.C.E.'O' level papers for both the lower secondary and upper secondary levels. I was also given the latest edition of the school prospectus,

which provides a background history of the school, its educational aims and objectives and its facilities.

During classroom observations, I collected copies of teacher constructed worksheets as well as students' exercise books and copies of their written class work. At the beginning of each week, I made a copy of the teacher's lesson notes for that whole week to decide on which lessons I would like to observe before discussing this with the teachers.

#### 3.6.4 Field notes

There were numerous opportunities for me to take field notes throughout the research period. I kept both concurrent and retrospective field notes throughout the research period. Concurrent field notes were taken during classroom observations: what the teacher did, the students' responses and the observer's impressions. Concurrent field notes are also taken during visits to the library, the canteen and in the teacher's room. The notes are largely about the physical constructs of these facilities. In the teacher's room, the relationships among teachers and between teachers and students who were summoned to the teacher's room were also noted during observations.

Most retrospective field notes consist of informal conversations with teachers in the staff room, students during recess time in their classrooms and before school starts. Field notes were also taken of the teacher's evaluation of their lessons after classroom observations. Sometimes, I would drop in on the deputy principal and the assistant principal in their offices and we would have an informal chat about language teaching in general and teachers' performance in particular. Other teachers stopped me now and again to ask about my research and some even offered general information about their subjects, such as Maths and Science, which are also taught in English.

I tried as much as possible to record all information immediately after each encounter while it was still fresh in my mind. I did not make concurrent notes during such informal encounters as it would have made the informants very

uncomfortable and unnatural in offering information. Some teachers even asked that I did not record what had been said in confidence. I always acknowledged such requests and assured them that I would not use the information in my analysis. After each encounter, I sat in a quiet corner to write my notes. Sometimes, I reviewed the notes taken during the day at night at home, occasionally adding information I had missed out. Sometimes I put question marks beside noted information that needed further clarification.

### 3.7 Review of methodological approach to analysis of data

This section of the chapter discusses the particular approach to the methods of analysis that I have used to produce the findings and results in this study. For the purpose of clarity and coherence, I have divided the section into three parts. The first part discusses the particular approach employed based on this being the most appropriate and efficient method in maximising the findings. The second part contains a narration of the procedures of analysis, that is a step-by-step account of the procedures I have taken to arrive at the findings and results. The third part contains the personal reflections of the researcher on the data collection and analysis undertaken during the research period.

#### 3.7.1 An ethnomethodological approach to analysis

The method of analysis for my study can be better understood within the illustrative framework shown in Fig. 3.2, which will become the focus of discussion for the rest of this section.

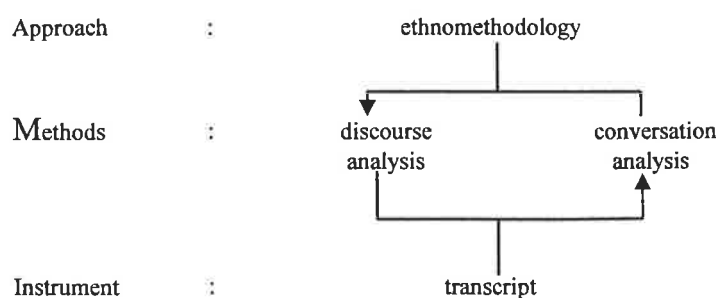


Fig. 3.2 A framework of methodology of analysis for the study

From the outset, the concepts of the school as a whole and the classroom which forms a part of it are complex phenomena. According to Metz (2000), “schools are distinctive organisations in several respects: their raw material and products are children, not things, and their well-educated workers must make constant on-the-spot decisions in ambiguous circumstances” (p.65). Despite the considerably large library of research studies carried out in language classrooms, we still have little knowledge of what actually goes on in L2 classrooms: “we actually know remarkably little about typical practices in language learning, and there is a great need for additional comparative studies” (Brumfit & Mitchell, 1989: 12). According to Stubbs (1983a:91), “our ignorance of what actually happens in classrooms is spectacular”. Both Metz and Seedhouse (1995) believe that this is because there is yet to be an adequate conceptual or practical framework or methodology for describing, analysing and evaluating the principles of schooling and interaction in the classroom.

It is my view that one possible and legitimate methodology is to employ an ethnomethodological approach to describing, explaining and analysing the phenomenon of formal language instruction. This is particularly because ethnomethodology studies are most suited to examining complex systems and phenomena (Mehan, 1975; Zimmerman & Boden, 1993). According to Mehan, ethnomethodology investigates the interactional activities that sustain the assumptions of a larger process at work. For Zimmerman and Boden (1993), an ethnomethodological approach to analysis provides insights into interaction as an activity that makes sense of an external world. One of the main justifications for the appropriateness of the ethnomethodological approach to analysis in my study comes from Garfinkel (1969a), where ethnomethodology has been suggested for:

activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings “account-able”. The “reflexive” or “incarnate” character of accounting practices makes up the crux of that recommendation. When I speak of unaccountable my interests are directed to such matters as the following ... that they are made

to happen as events in, the same ordinary events that in organising they describe ... (p:1)

From the excerpt above, accountability is perhaps the major factor underlying my choice of an ethnomethodological approach to analysis in this particular study. The describable, reportable and recordable nature of talk produced in the language classroom can reflect more directly or openly the features of its overall socio-cultural structure, particularly its constraining and liberating character.

One of the two methods of analysis used against the backdrop of the ethnomethodological approach in this study is discourse analysis. If discourse analysis is defined in the linguistic sense as examining “a continuous stretch of naturally occurring spoken or written language that is larger than a sentence and, in some structural or functional way, hangs together as a unit for analysis” (Freeman, 1993:89) or “actual stretches of naturally occurring written or spoken discourse” (Hornberger, 1995:236), then it appears that such an analysis is particularly appropriate for this study. The main bulk of the data that I have collected are naturally occurring spoken discourses. The conversations with the different members of the school in the loosely semi-structured interviews contain stretches of natural language spoken by the principal, teachers and students in the school.

Natural classroom language is also recorded during observations of the English lessons in progress. Although it may be questioned whether there can possibly be natural behaviour when the teachers and students are constantly being made aware of the intrusion of an outsider and equipment in the classroom, it is nevertheless natural in the sense that the language produced has not occurred under controlled or experimental conditions.

Discourse analysis is also compatible with the overall ethnographic approach employed in this study. Many such research studies in schools have made use of discourse analysis in various ways. Interactional sociolinguists use discourse analysis in an attempt to understand the social meanings embedded in classroom

codeswitching (Gumperz, 1972; Milk, 1981; Guthrie, 1983). Furthermore, it is my view that the stretches of natural language in discourse analyses provide research work with credible 'stories' that enable readers to discover the unstable, disorderly and complex yet logical linguistic behaviour of a specific group of people in a particular setting. This view is supported by such research work emerging in the literature of language education (Althanases & Heath, 1995; Luttrell, 2000). The monologic, lengthy instructional talk employed by teachers during classroom instruction is one such example. Though viewed to be nonsensical and contrived in any other context, teachers' instructional talk tells but one of several important 'stories' that constitute the way language is taught and learnt in formal educational settings.

The other method of analysis employed in this study is conversation analysis. In this study, it is defined according to the work of conversation analysts in other institutional settings (Schegloff, 1987a; Wilson, 1993; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987). In particular, focus is on "the organisation of conversational interaction as such and in particular on the analysis of its endogenously generated sequential opportunities and constraints as these are observed to operate turn by turn within conversations across diverse occasions, different participants and distinct languages" (Zimmerman & Boden, 1993:9). In a significant sense, the analysis of teacher-student exchanges in this study not only focuses on how each turn in the conversation is determined by the turn previous to it, but also takes into consideration the overall wider context surrounding it.

Thus, the mechanisms in the conversational interaction, such as the allocation of turns, repair, questions asked and answered, requests made and assessments offered, are systematically analysed in an attempt to understand how they are organised to accomplish the interactional task and ultimately the relationship between talk and social and cultural practices. An analysis of the sequential organisation of the IRF, for example, shows not only the shape of the talk, but also how teachers and students act to enable the reproduction of institutional patterns and norms of the L2 instruction. Furthermore, I have found that a focus on conversation analysis in terms of the linguistic features and patterns present in interaction reveals quite clearly and explicitly the pedagogical purpose/s of the

lesson, which may be necessary for any kind of valid evaluation to take place in research work of this nature.

More importantly, it is my belief that conversation analysis gives a “humanistic perspective” so to speak, to the clinical, scientific nature of research work in general. This is especially true when the researcher is an ‘outsider’ to the situation who does not possess insider knowledge of the processes at work. During my observations of the interaction between teachers and students in the language classrooms, I found myself getting initial glimpses of the participants’ intentions and purposes during the act of interacting. When the teacher makes the initiation move by asking a question, she is claiming a privileged relation to formal school knowledge and by remaining silent or offering a hesitant and brief, concise response, the student reveals his/her position as the learner acquiring that knowledge. By referring closely and explicitly to how they interact with each other in terms of who they are and what they are doing, it is possible to create a connection between the researcher’s interpretation and that of the teacher or students.

The isolated or autonomous focus on conversation analysis does not, however, imply that it is disconnected from or independent of discourse analysis. In Fig. 3.2, we see how the two methods interweave to inform and refine one another in order to bring about relatively coherent and reliable findings. Both, for example, share the common characteristic of analysing transcripts of naturally occurring language. In many instances of classroom interaction, analyses are carried out using a combination of both methods to provide for complementary findings.

It is easy, however, to see the limitations of these methods of analysis in terms of the subjectivity of their findings and results, at least from an absolutist viewpoint where truth can only come from objective and impartial findings. In other words, the argument is that the truth is distorted once findings are vulnerable to different possible interpretations and explanations. In particular studies, this may be so. But in any ethnographic approach to investigation and discovery, as in this study, this vulnerability is seen to be both a limitation and strength. It cannot offer a paramount truth but one possible truth, one possible reality. This truth is based on



the observations and analysis of human behaviour/s by one researcher in human communities and as such the truth/s or reality can only “occur within a shifting web of practical circumstances” (Mehan, 1975: 226). The strength in studies of this nature is that results and findings are not derived from events under controlled or manipulated conditions. They attempt to present a frank and candid examination of the situation under study without hiding the inherent blemishes and flaws.

The main material for analysis employed in this study is the transcripts of the interviews and classroom observations recorded throughout the research period. By transcripts, I mean the recording of actual language used in the interviews (see Appendix 2) and by the teachers and students during the 35-minute English lessons in the classroom. The recording is made possible through audio taping the interviews and classroom observations.

Transcribing, as I have found out, as have others (Graddol, Maybin & Stierer, 1994; Ochs, 1979), can be very time consuming. In this case, I had to transcribe six 35-minute lessons in detail (see Appendix 3), a challenging and often frustrating task. Despite using a good field recorder, the classroom is not an ideal place for audio recording. There are times when the recorder failed to pick up pieces of talk during interaction. The result is that gaps appeared during transcribing and I had to resort to the video taping to fill them. In a few instances, it has not been possible to reproduce what is actually said during conversations and I had put the utterances within brackets [unintelligible]. Added to this is the accent of the teachers, because very often the pronunciation and stress or intonation in the teachers’ speech vary not only among themselves but also from my own and so I have to spend more time trying to decipher what they are saying.

Even when I did manage to complete a reasonably workable piece of transcript, there often seemed to be nothing there of significance, at least not until I had scrutinised it a number of times. Even then, I ended up more confused than ever. I am reminded of how Richmond (1984) felt when he had to transcribe talk among a group of girls in a school in South London:

There are times when you stare at the video, or at transcripts, or at writing, and ask yourself, "well, is there anything here at all?" and for a while you lose your nerve. Or there are periods of impatience for answers, when there may be no answers" (p.60-1).

Transcriptions also are able to provide only verbal information and cannot include the non-verbal signs such as eye contact, smiles, nods and so forth, signs that can add important information to the analysis. In this study, I did watch the video tape of the lesson after I had transcribed it to achieve a clearer understanding of the interaction and thus the transcription. Sometimes, the video clips helped me fill in what I had missed from the audio taping. Non-verbal gestures like the fluttering of the teacher's hands, sometimes in frustration during oral interaction, the students' stance during response and so forth are put into the transcription to help in the analysis process. For me, supporting instruments such as the video tapes, field notes and documents have all been crucial to the preparation of efficient and relatively unbiased transcription.

Very often, transcriptions are also not free of the intrusions of the transcriber's own beliefs and expectations about the participants and the interaction itself. Bucholtz (2000) finds from studying the transcripts recorded by the police during interrogation of accused persons that there are inconsistencies between what is recorded and what is actually said. According to her, there is no such thing as an objective transcript because all transcripts involve interpretation: "All transcripts takes sides, enabling certain interpretations, advancing particular interests, favouring specific speakers, and so on" (p.1440). Certainly, when I was transcribing the recordings of the interviews with the principal, teachers and student groups, I found myself inevitably making personal judgements about some of the views expressed by the participants. As a result, the transcripts may have unintentionally been prejudiced by my personal opinions about some of the material being recorded, such as punctuations, for example.

However, in an attempt to reduce the limitations of transcription as an instrument of analysis, I did give a copy of the transcription to the respective interviewee to read through and discuss areas of ambiguity or misunderstanding arising from the transcripts. In addition to this, I also try to triangulate by comparing the transcript

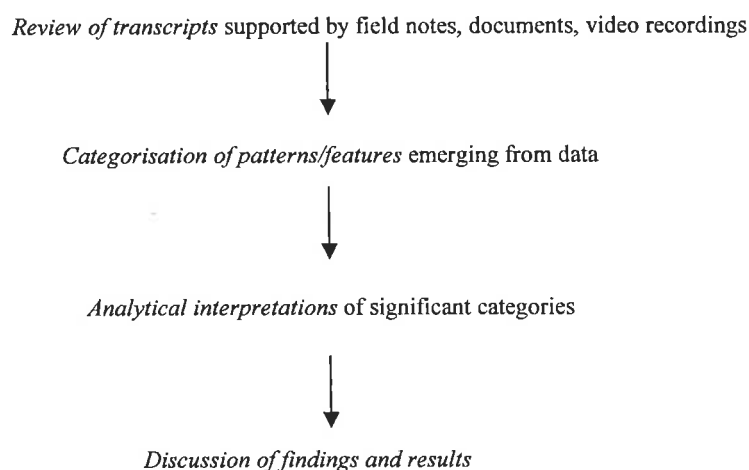
with other supporting sources of data collection, particularly in ambiguous areas. In this study, the supporting instruments become important points of reference. These are in the form of retrospective and concurrent field notes I have taken in the classroom observations, of informal conversations with members of the school community and of school documents such as students' written work, teachers' lesson notes, assessment papers and video recording during interviews and class lessons.

This is not to discredit the significance of transcripts as a tool of analysis. In fact, there is general acceptance among researchers in the field of social science and education of the emerging importance of transcripts as an instrument of analysis (Stubbs, 1983b; Cook, 1990; Roberts, 1997). One of the main considerations behind the use of transcripts in my study is that suggested in Graddol, Maybin and Stierer (1994) that "transcripts provide a permanent and easily accessible record of spoken language and they can allow you to look at this in considerable detail. They may be used to examine quantitative or qualitative aspects of talk, or a mixture of the two" (p.39). Thus, it is my view that, as a tool for analysis, transcripts are well suited to the overall methodological framework of this study.

This study does not make use of coding instruments in the sense that I have not gone into the classrooms armed with a pre-determined checklist of criteria to mark off during observations. According to Seedhouse (1995), coding systems have been by far the most common method of classroom analysis. They have been particularly effective in certain studies such as those pertaining to teacher training and looking at specific behaviour. I do not think they can be effective in my study where the complexity of the relationship between structure and practice is foregrounded. As Van Lier (1988:45) puts it, coding systems "fail to address the complexity of classroom interaction". I have also not employed coding systems as supporting instruments of analysis mainly because whatever is recorded may still have been interpreted from my perspective as a researcher rather than that of the participants in the interaction. Instead, my supporting documents for analysis are in the form of descriptive field notes, school documents and audio-video tapings, all of which contain some element of the insider's perspectives.

### 3.8 Procedures of analysis

By the end of the research period, I was confronted with an overwhelming amount of data that made little sense at first glance. The challenge now was to develop an efficient and systematic procedure of data analysis with the aim of yielding the best possible findings that address the research questions driving the study. Throughout the process of analysis, I returned to the guiding research questions repeatedly and at every stage so as not to deviate from the course set out at the beginning of the study. I find this to be extremely important because, in a complex study such as this, it is very easy to lose focus amidst the challenging and overwhelming amount of data.



*Fig. 3.3 Outline of the stages of analysis*

I set out my analysis procedures according to four stages in sequential order. This is outlined in Fig. 3.3. The first stage is to carry out a review of the transcripts in order to make sense of what each transcript tries to convey. Wherever possible, the review is supported by references to supporting tools such as field notes and documents. Significant patterns and features emerging from the review of the data are then categorised and coded for easy reference and analysis. The categorisation of patterns and features from the data is then subjected to various forms of analytical interpretations. The last stage of analysis is the discussion of the findings derived from the analyses in an effort to contribute to current research literature and to consolidate the results and discoveries made within the purpose of the study.

I use the same stages in the analysis of data for the transcripts of both the interviews and classroom observations. To some extent, the same procedures are

observed for supporting instruments of analysis. With the interviews, I carry out a review of each interview by first reading through the entire transcript. Next, I cut out the few questions altogether and paste the interviewee's stretches of talk in such a way that the transcript reads like a narrative. The reason for this is to get a better sense of what is being said from the interviewee's perspective. After a second reading, I then look at each utterance and highlight words, phrases and expressions that I think have some bearing on ESL formal instruction. Words such as "grammar", "assessments" and "discipline", for example, are quite revealing in what they convey about the way the L2 is taught and learnt in the classroom. I make a list of all the highlighted expressions in a note book along the left hand side of the page. I then go back to the transcript and read the highlighted portions carefully, making notes on the right hand side of the page as I go along. I do this with all the eleven transcripts (two each from the three English language teachers, two from the principal and one each from three different student groups).

After reviewing the transcript in this way, I then study the notes recorded in my notebook. It took me a few months just studying these notes before I was able to see certain definite patterns and features emerging from the data before me. I sort out the patterns and features that share similar characteristics into categories, having developed a system for coding these categories for accessible and easy reference during analysis. Thus, expressions relating to 'assessment' are put under code "A", for example, and those that collocate with 'authority' are put under code "AU". From these coded categories, I can see how some features and patterns become increasingly more significant than others. At this point, I also write out a summary report of the field notes and retrospective verbal reports on classroom observations (see Appendix 4). These summaries become my point of reference whenever I encounter ambiguity or inconsistency in categorising the patterns and features that emerge from the interview data.

The categorisation process is followed by analytical interpretations of the categories drawn up. I study the features in each category and subject them to in-depth interpretations based on discourse and conversation analyses. Here, various forms of these analyses are employed, focusing on the function, content and

structure of the interview texts in order to bring about comprehensive findings and results.

The final stage of analysis is a thorough discussion of the findings arrived at from the first three stages of the analysis process. It is here that attempts are made to highlight insights gained from the findings to address the purpose of the study and also to relate the findings to current research literature in the field.

In analysing classroom transcripts, I have made a full transcript of six of the eighteen formal classroom observations that I carried out. By formal observations, I mean the occasions where I have gone into the classrooms fully equipped with audio and video tape recorders in addition to making concurrent field notes during observations. The six transcribed lessons are selected in such a way that they represent the stage of the research at different points in time. Thus, two are selected from the beginning part of the research period, two from the middle and two near the end.

The stages of analysis are similar to those for the interviews. An initial review is carried out on all six classroom transcripts. Each transcript is scrutinised in terms of structure of interaction between teachers and students, the content of the interaction, including its linguistic features and the function or purpose of each sequence of talk. Detailed notes of each review are then recorded in the note book. The notes are matched with summaries of the concurrent field notes taken during observations. The teachers' lesson notes and post-lesson evaluations are also taken into account in order to triangulate the findings. From the detailed notes, definite and significant patterns or features of talk emerge across all six lessons. These patterns and features are then sorted into defining categories for analysis.

During the analysis it became clear that it would serve the purpose of the study more effectively if an in-depth examination of one, rather than all six lessons, was carried out. Therefore, the task fell to choosing the one lesson that best reflected the patterns of talk that had emerged from the review of all six lessons. Moreover, it was thought that a similar thorough treatment of all six lessons was not only unrealistic but also a project that could be difficult for one study to accommodate.

Moreover, such an undertaking was not necessary within the overall scope and purpose of this study.

The final stage of analysis is a detailed discussion of the findings that the analyses have yielded and is carried out in a similar way to that of the interviews.

### 3.9 Personal reflections about the data collection.

It is appropriate that the last part of this section be devoted to some personal reflections and thoughts about my period of data collection in the school. It would be too simple to say that it had been very interesting because it was much more than that. I experienced successive moments of emotional highs and lows, challenges and frustrations. The entire period of data collection was like a slow metamorphosis for me as an observer and researcher. The changing perceptions of myself as researcher and of the members of the school community towards me can be best described in three stages - (i) the 'outsider', (ii) the 'friendly observer' and (iii) the 'trusted confidante'.

During the first two weeks, I was made to feel like an outsider, uncomfortable in an alien culture. Getting even the most mundane information was difficult. I would be in school almost every day in the teacher's room, trying without success to get to know the teachers better. To the teachers, I was the unwelcome 'observer' intruding into their domain. There was thus a keenly felt wariness about my presence in the school. I felt that gulf between researcher and teachers that Woods (1986) noted in his education research studies. They did not trust me. Whenever, I spoke to the teachers, they were reluctant to offer information and even hinted that I might report what they said to the school authorities. The fact that I could not quite give them a clear picture of the nature of my research made matters worse.

While I felt that to the teachers I was the unwelcome informant hired by the school administrators to spy on them, to the students I was the "outsider" hired to report on them to their teachers. I realised that the students are generally suspicious of all adults, especially those who resemble their teachers. Under the

circumstances, they had to tolerate my presence in their classes and I felt like an intruder. The first few classroom observations were thus very uncomfortable and awkward for the teachers, students and myself as the observer. In one of my talks with some of the students during break, they reluctantly told me that they did not like the video camera as it made them uncomfortable. In a sense, my earlier classroom observations were affected to some extent by the intrusion of all the equipment and my presence.

Interviews and document collection were equally unpleasant tasks during those first two weeks. The first interview I had with a teacher during the second week is stilted and unnatural. She agreed to the interview I think, because she had to. As a result, the session was more an interrogation rather than a pleasant, friendly interview. Collecting documents was particularly difficult, especially if I ask if I can make copies of them. When I asked for copies of exam and assessment papers from the office, they wanted to know why. When I asked teachers for copies of students' work, they gave me the work done by their best students. I had the feeling that everyone was afraid I would report unfavourably about what I found.

It was not until well past the third week that I was gradually accepted by the school community. When they found that I was there not to spy on them but to do research, the atmosphere improved and they became more friendly. There were more spontaneous conversations initiated by teachers and students. There was a higher level of trust together with a deeper personal relationship developing between the observed and the observer. Classroom behaviour became more natural as students and teachers got used to the idea of being observed as claimed by Van Lier (1988). Observations thus became easier and more pleasant. Students would sometimes approach me to ask open questions about my presence and offered information more freely when they thought they could contribute to the research. It became easier for me to ask for documents especially when they believe that these documents were for important research purposes. I had a lot more support from the administrators as they took pains to answer some of my questions when I went to see them. But what was most surprising was the attitude of the teachers towards me. Where they had been very suspicious before, now they were open and friendly. Sometimes, I even had teachers of maths and science



offering information about teaching those subjects in English. A friendship gradually developed between the teachers and myself.

However, the truly fulfilling part and I think, the period which proved to be most crucial to the study was in the last two or three weeks of the research period. As Luttrell (2000) has found with her subjects, I was able, at that stage, to form a trusting, personal relationship with the members of the school community. It was only then, that like Donnelly (2000) I was able to understand the complexities and intricacies of the school ethos. Gradually, a coherent picture emerges that explains what actually goes on in the classroom and school.

Interviews became very personal. Interviewees were able to talk about how they really felt about issues to do with the school system in general and language teaching and learning in particular. I became a confidante, not just an interviewer in their eyes, someone on to whom they could load their most inner feelings. Also by now, both teachers and students have become very used to being observed. My presence was accepted as that of an observer who is really interested in what they do in the classroom, not a judge. I also found myself more adept at setting up the various pieces of equipment without too much fuss or frustration. The students feel very much less threatened by the video camera and sometimes even help in manipulating it to capture the various aspects of the class.

When I first started out thinking about a methodology for the collection of data, it was a simple listing down of what I should do. I knew exactly what I wanted to do. But when I go into the actual school, I find myself having to make changes because I am suddenly confronted by issues and questions which I did not think existed before. Moreover, I have to do a considerable amount of negotiation due to the sensitive nature of the research methodology. I cannot take photographs as I intended to because the administrators are not very receptive to that idea. I cannot hold more interviews as I would have liked because of the tight schedules of the interviewees. But the end results have been more than worthwhile. I am able to discover, as other influential ethnographers have discovered (Grotjahn, 1987; Bailey, 1998; Van Lier, 1996), the value of ethnography as an approach to

research of this nature. It is messy and not immediately transparent, but yields data in their most natural state.

The analysis of data proves to be both a challenging and frustrating experience. Perhaps, the main problem or dilemma, to be more accurate, lies in the constant struggle between a detailed and rigorous approach to analysis and an interpretative-narrative one. I know that a focus on the former will lead to more disciplined, objective findings while attention paid to the latter will provide for findings that are subjective and personal. In the end, I decided on a combination of the two with a tendency towards the interpretative-narrative approach to analysis. I find it difficult to adopt a wholly objective approach because this will mean overlooking the nuances of observations that may be significant to the overall purpose of this particular study.

Moreover, the methodological framework here is particularly suitable to a more narrative manner of analysis. The main weakness or constraint is the subjectivity of findings which I have attempted to reduce through a triangulation of data collection and analysis. As to the issue of representativeness, the aim of this study from the outset has been less about general representativeness and more about particular representativeness. More to the point is that it is an in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon in particular settings. It looks at ESL formal instruction in ESL societies and therefore identifies with formal language education in other similar situations.

Another difficulty I have encountered during analysis is in setting up tables and figures to present the findings. The “boxing” up of features and patterns to demonstrate specific findings may have been misleading. I think, in an attempt to clarify and explain the findings through the use of tables and figures or an illustrative framework, I may have created more confusion. This is largely because many of the patterns and features of L2 teaching and learning do not occur in isolation, nor are they separate or independent of one another. Instead, they intermingle and exhibit a fluidity in their relationships to one another in ways that can be misrepresented when they are boxed up in neat defining tabulated figures. Thus, I use dotted enclosures wherever possible to show that patterns and

features found in the behaviour of the participants are not absolute and arbitrary but flexible and mutually dependent on other variables. This is yet another instance of the complexity of carrying out research work of this nature.

The end result is a study with all the inherent flaws that come with the methods of analysis employed. It is also a study that provides unique insights into a situation under relatively untampered and naturally occurring conditions.

### 3.10 Ethical considerations

Since this research involves people and human behaviour in particular, all participants of the study have been treated with human dignity and respect. Consent has been sought from the relevant authority, permission has been asked and confidentiality of data and anonymity has been ensured. Participant involvement was strictly voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished. Above all, ethical codes served as the guiding and abiding principle throughout the process of conducting this study.

### Summary

The methodology used in conducting this research study is ethnographic in nature. In particular, the conception of ethnography entails the deployment of specific “tools” of data collection and analysis that enable in-depth exploration of the school and classroom L2 learning in ways that raise awareness, questions and suggestions in the field of ESL classroom acquisition in ESL societies. The two main sources of data collection are interviews and classroom observations, supported by retrospective and concurrent field notes, documents gathered in the school and audio and video recordings. The analysis of the data is driven by the ethnomethodological approach. In addition, two interrelated methods of analysis are employed - discourse analysis and conversation analysis - in order to bring about the best possible findings for the study. The instrument of analysis are the transcript recordings of the interviews and classroom talk during the English lessons at the secondary school level. Despite the inherent flaws and limitations of the analysis methodology in studies of this nature, the findings do provide insights

into ESL formal instruction under naturally occurring and non-experimental conditions.

## Chapter 4

### The Bruneian ESL Context

#### - A Case Study

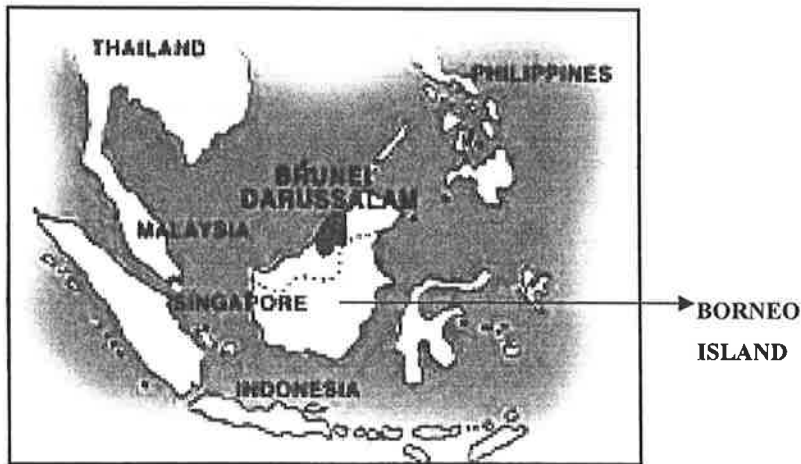
#### 4 Introduction

This chapter provides information pertaining to the context and specific site for the study. It is divided into two sections. The first section gives a general overview of Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei) in terms of its geographic location and the role of the English language in the country, including the English language education programme in the school system. The second section focuses on the particular site selected for this research study. This is a long established school in the country. In particular, the section examines the various aspects of the school in terms of its student and English language teacher composition, academic structure, assessment system and the English language teaching and learning system.

#### 4.1 The geographic location of Brunei

Brunei is an Islamic sultanate in South East Asia and is located on the north-west of Borneo Island shown in Map 4.1 below. As shown in Map 4.1,

Brunei is surrounded by the countries of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Brunei shares a number of linguistic similarities with these countries, the main one being the fact that English is not the first language of the country. As with all the other countries in the region, however, English has become increasingly influential and significant in Brunei in its quest for economic and technological progress. Thus, in Brunei, in Malaysia and Singapore, English functions as an important second language both in society as a whole and in the school system.



*Map 4.1 Geographic location of Brunei in South East Asia*

Brunei has a land area of about 5,765 sq. km. and a population of 330,700 (1999). 67.6% of this population are Malays. Malays include the indigenous ethnic groups of Brunei such as the Kedayan, Tutong, Belait, Bisaya, Dusun, Murut and the ethnic “Brunei” who are historically, politically and numerically the most important group in the country. 14% are Chinese, while non-Malay indigenous groups such as the Ibans, Penans and Kelabit account for 5.9%. Other unspecified races form 11.6% of the population (Brunei Statistical Yearbook, 1999). Because of its large oil and gas industries, Bruneians generally enjoy a high standard of living.

#### 4.2 The role of English in Brunei

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Magellan first entered Brunei waters, Malay was the common language of communication in South East Asia (Alisjahbana, 1974:393). Not surprisingly, it became the most important language in Brunei and remained so until it became a British Protectorate in 1888. The advent of the British, both in Brunei and the region surrounding it, marked the introduction of the English language in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The arrival of the first British Resident in 1906 brought with it the British colonial administration. Throughout the Residency period from 1906 to 1959, Malay and English were widely used in different domains. While Malay was used within the country, English was used for contact

with the outside world. Since the arrival of multinational oil companies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, English has become increasingly used within Brunei among the expatriates themselves and the locals who work in these companies.

Today, English is commonly used in the private sector as well as in finance and education and for multinational meetings. Malay continues to be used in government offices as well as in the home for cultural and religious functions. But youngsters in Brunei today are widely exposed to the English language through a powerful television media with a wide selection of American movies, as well as the Capital FM radio station in London. More and more in Brunei today, there is a growing awareness that the English language has to be included in any national development plan. Trade, industry and commerce recognize a role for the English language and the government has been pushing schools to produce competent speakers of English to represent Brunei in the global forum.

#### 4.8 Language Planning in Brunei

Currently, the language situation in Brunei is a result of reaction to changes in its economic development rather than a deliberate language planning policy leading to change. Language planning has not occurred in any official sense, although there has recently been discussion of some kind of language planning for the country. Brunei, however, has what Kaplan (1990) calls a language-in-education policy which, though unwritten (Jones, 2001), has the tacit approval of the government for implementation in the schools. Decisions have been made to incorporate Malay and English in Bruneian schools and it is up to the Ministry of Education to implement such a policy with the support of the government. Perhaps the definition which most closely describes language planning in Brunei is that provided by Weinstein, who includes a role for the government:

A government authorized long term sustained and conscious effort to alter a language itself or to change a language's functions in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems (Weinstein, 1980:37)

The reference to long-term and sustainable change here appears to apply to the introduction of a bilingual education system, thus acknowledging the importance of two languages, Malay and English, in the society. The government's response has been made mainly through the Ministry of Education. So in a sense, language planning in Brunei has been led by economic trends, which has resulted in a language-in-education policy.

#### 4.4 Language-in-education policy

According to Jones (1997) the language-in-education programme in Brunei is a type observed by Bauldauf (1990), that is, one which arises as a response to rather than instigator of change. Education is seen to respond to the needs of industry. The major industries in Brunei are oil and gas, dominated by multinational English-speaking corporations. The wealth generated by these industries has led to the establishment of banks and finance houses and therefore a need for an English-educated workforce. This need determines the language policy in Brunei, particularly through its education system.

#### 4.5 Reaction to the language policy in Brunei

The adoption of a bilingual education system in Brunei has been accepted with little opposition and even with a great deal of public support (Jones, in press). However, Jones goes on to claim that the bilingual school system has resulted in some questions being raised about the place of Malay in the curriculum and ultimately the society. With the influx of Western culture and values through its media network where exposure to the English language is high, the fear of losing the Malay culture can perhaps be understood.

In Brunei, Malay and English are supposed to complement each other rather than compete. Certain domains and functions are commonly accepted as Malay or English speaking. Malay is used during family and religious discussion and functions and in communication between the government and its people. English, on the other hand, is used in the law courts (a remnant of the British Protectorate days), banks, industry and communication with the outside world. Jones (1997)



attributes the fear of English domination by certain individuals and bodies to a lack of both cohesive language planning in the country and understanding of the objectives and expectations of the bilingual education policy.

#### 4.6 The Dwibahasa Policy

The bilingual education system (dwibahasa meaning “two languages”) was introduced into Bruneian schools in 1985 and was fully implemented by 1993. In this system, English-as-medium-of-instruction is seen as gradually replacing Malay, particularly in the teaching of compulsory subjects. The aim of the Dwibahasa policy was to “instil solidarity among the people of the nation by means of a single system of education” (Jones, 1990:299). This makes sense, given the large variety of different language medium schools operating in the country at that time. The desire of the policy was to solidify and rationalize the education system in the country. Edwards (1993), however, questions the promotion of “solidarity” given the emphasis placed on two languages. There is always the possibility of exposure through English to “unwanted cultural practices” (Edwards, 1993:30) among its student population.

Brunei has a situation of mostly Malay- speaking children from a homogenous (though multidialectal) language background entering school and being taught through two separate mediums. English is introduced in stages, assuming greater importance at the secondary levels. By the time they reach secondary school, Bruneian students receive about 80% of their education in English. At this stage, English becomes the medium of instruction in all the content subjects.

The objective of dwibahasa is to maintain the first language (Malay) while trying to achieve a satisfactory level of competence in English as the second language. According to Jones, Martin and Ozog (1993:54), it would be unrealistic to expect that dwibahasa will produce ‘equi’ or ‘balanced’ bilinguals in Brunei, given the way in which the second language is acquired.

#### 4.7 English language teaching context in Brunei schools

#### 4.7.1 The make-up of the school system

The system of schooling in Brunei is based largely on the British system. This is not surprising given that it had been a British Protectorate until independence in 1984. The school system is basically quite conservative in the sense that traditional language teaching methods like choral reading, rote-learning and repetition still feature strongly in the classroom (Nikman, 1991; Murni, 1996). Classes at the primary level and often at the secondary levels are large, with about 30-45 students per class. Table 4.2 shows the medium of instruction in the Brunei primary and secondary schools. From primary 1 to 3, English is taught as a subject with Malay as the medium of instruction for all other subjects. From primary 4 to 6, more subjects are taught in English. English becomes increasingly more significant at the secondary levels where all the content subjects are taught in English with the exception of Malay language, Ugama (religious instruction), MIB (Melayu Islam Beraja) where students are taught the tenets of Islam and the history of the Royal family, physical education and art/craft. The English language becomes the medium of instruction. In addition, each class is given five 30-minute English periods per week.

The curriculum is exam-driven in that students must sit for the Primary Certificate of Education (PCE), the national public exam, at the end of Primary 6. They are required to pass the PCE to seek entry into secondary education and students must sit for and pass one national exam at secondary 3 (PMB- Penelian Menengah Bawah) to enter secondary 4.

English medium subjects		Malay medium subjects
	Lower Primary	
English Language		Malay Language Mathematics General Studies Islamic Religious Knowledge Physical Training Arts & Handicraft Civics
	Upper Primary	
English Language Mathematics Science History Geography		Malay Language Islamic Religious Knowledge Physical Training Arts & Handicraft Civics
	Lower Secondary	
English Language Mathematics Science History Geography		Malay Language Islamic Religious Knowledge
	Upper Secondary	
English Language Mathematics Science/Art/Technical subjects (depending on stream)		Malay Language

*Table 4.2 Compulsory and examinable subjects and their medium of instruction in Brunei primary and secondary schools (extracted from Jones, 1990:302)*

The externally marked B.G.C.E. 'O' level examinations (Brunei-Cambridge Certificate of Education) are taken at Secondary 5 to gain entry into university or the job markets (see Appendices 5 & 6). Although there is an oral component in these exams, it is largely ignored by teachers who tend to emphasise written skills such as summary writing. Because of the significance of these exams to the future aspirations of students and the schools' expectations, teachers tend to be preoccupied with preparatory teaching for the exams at the end of the school year. The backwash effect is particularly strong at the higher levels resulting in very little genuinely communicative use of English.

#### 4.7.2 The textbooks used in schools

Up until 1993, English textbooks and materials used in schools were those imported from Singapore and Malaysia language curriculums. In 1994, the language curriculum in Brunei was set up to develop local textbooks for use in Bruneian schools – Primary English for Brunei Darussalam (PEBD) for the primary classes and Secondary English for Brunei Darussalam (SEBD) for the secondary level (see Appendix 4). The textbooks come with workbooks, teacher guidebooks and cassette tapes for listening activities. These books aim at providing greater opportunities for language use in meaningful contexts.

Based on the functional/notional syllabus, they reflect the curriculum's positive response to promoting communicative competence among students. Each unit is divided into 5 sections promoting the use of all the four language skills. Comprehension passages are followed by class or group discussions about the topic. This is followed by listening exercises where students listen to a cassette tape (using native speakers) for information. There are also examples of functions such as greetings where students practise the different forms and ways of greeting someone. Writing exercises are preceded by group, pair or class discussions. There has yet to be a concerted effort to carry out a detailed analysis of the content of the textbooks, nor how they are being used and responded to by teachers and students. This neglect will be addressed by my study as one of its research questions.

#### 4.8.2 Patterns of classroom interaction in the Bruneian ESL classroom: a literature review

Research literature on the ESL classroom in the Bruneian context has been limited at best to isolated instances of classroom observations, more often in the primary and lower secondary classroom. Existing studies of classroom interaction in Bruneian schools find the IRE pattern (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) to be dominant in the primary and lower secondary language classrooms. Martin (1995) in his study of content lessons in the primary classroom concludes that teacher talk is excessive with restricted student response. There is also a lot of code-switching between the L1 and L2. Similarly, Baetens-Beardsmore (1995) in his

classroom observations at the primary level finds that teachers tend to do most of the talking while students listen passively.

Studies in the upper primary and lower secondary classes (Cath & McLellan, 1993; Murni, 1996) yield similar findings regardless of whether they are content subjects like History and Geography or a language subject like reading comprehension. Chua-Wong and McLellan (1996) in looking at how meanings are negotiated in the primary English lessons conclude that much of the interaction consists of choral repetition after the teacher, rearranging sentences and reading aloud. Cath and McLellan (1993) show classroom discourse at lower secondary level to be largely teacher-dominated with minimal student output.

These findings have led to suggestions and thoughts about a largely uninformed ESL teaching workforce and students who still look upon their teachers as the main authority in the classroom (Jones, 1997; Baetens-Beardsmore, 1995). However, these conclusions are based on the limited current research and are therefore tentative at the most. It has been agreed by language teachers and trainers that more research is needed to truly understand the ESL situation in Brunei.

#### 4.8 Site for the study

The school under study is situated in Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital of Brunei shown in Map 4.3.



*Map 4.3 Location of the school under study*

This is in the north-eastern part of the country and is the seat of the Brunei government. Established in 1957, the school is one of the earliest co-educational English medium institutions in the country and has a long-established history as the major education provider for the majority of Bruneians. The main aims of the school are to maintain its proud tradition of academic excellence and to uphold the national education system of Brunei to educate young men and women to meet the manpower needs of the nation.

#### 4.8.1 The student population

Today, the school has a student population of over 1,700 boys and girls in 48 classes: kindergarten - 6 classes; primary 1 to 6 - 24 classes and secondary 1 to 5 - 18 classes. Local Bruneian students make up well over 60% of the student population with the other 40% coming from the neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, where English also functions as a second language. These students are from multi-ethnic and multiracial backgrounds in the sense that each class may be made up of Indians, Chinese, Malays, Eurasians and so forth, thus bringing to the school their distinct and different cultures and traditions. More than 80% of the students come from non-English speaking homes. Although students in Brunei are quite widely exposed to the English language through the various forms of media available, the acquisition has been largely that of passive assimilation. Thus, while learners are able to listen and comprehend in the target language, they exhibit considerable difficulty in speaking it fluently and confidently. The classroom is perhaps the only place where actual oral production in the L2 occurs.

At the secondary level, the student population stands at around 700. The classes are large with an average of about 38 students in a class to one English language teacher. Classes at the lower secondary levels (secondary 1 to 3) are mixed ability classes while students in the upper secondary classrooms (secondary 4 and 5) are streamed to either the Science or Arts/Combined Science classes. The streaming is based on students' performance in the public exams at the end of secondary 3. Students who obtained distinctions in the 3 main subjects - Maths, English and Science - will be eligible to enter the Science class while all other students will

automatically be put in the Arts/Combined Science classes, which are ‘average’ ability classes. When it comes to language ability, however, the difference between the two streams is minimal, as there may be many who have scored distinctions in the English language but are in the Arts/Combined Science stream because they had failed to obtain distinctions for the other two subjects.

#### 4.8.2 The English Language Teachers

As from 2001, the school has a total of 89 teachers, mainly recruited from Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, India and Sri Lanka. In line with the ministry’s policy on localisation, there is a gradual move towards recruiting more local teachers. There are currently four English language teachers at the secondary level, all of whom are non-native English speakers. Two are from Malaysia and two from India. These teachers teach English in both the lower and upper secondary classes. Apart from teaching English, they are required to teach another subject such as geography or history. They teach an average of 26 periods of English a week.

Out of the four teachers, two are trained and two have degrees in English but are not trained to teach the subject. None of the four, however, are trained in teaching English as a second language (TESL) although they each have an average of 25 years of teaching experience. These are teachers who are relatively confident in teaching English to secondary school students. Over the years in teaching, they have also developed clearly defined expectations of the learning of English as a subject in the school. All four teachers have been involved in formal education in ESL societies for a considerable amount of time and are more than aware of the aims and objectives of ESL language teaching and learning in the school context.

#### 4.8.3 Academic Structure

When it comes to academic structure, the school abides by the bilingual system of education, or Dwibahasa system. Under this policy, Bahasa Melayu is the medium of instruction for all subjects in the primary classes except for English. As the classes go up higher, English gradually gains in importance and takes over as the

medium of instruction. By the time students reach the upper secondary level, more than 90% of the subjects are taught in English. Moreover, the compulsory subjects such as English, Maths, Science and so forth will be in English with the non-exam subjects taught in Malay (see Appendix 10).

#### 4.8.4 Assessment System

Assignments are given on a regular basis. These assignments take the form of class work, oral and written exercises, group projects and homework. At the secondary level, assignments contribute to 40% of the term grades. The other 60% comes from four formal tests scattered throughout the school year, the mid-year exam and the end-of-year exam. A considerable amount of attention is paid to assessment. Teachers are expected to use tests and assessments to help prepare and assess students for school and public exams. The school prepares students for three formal public exams - the Primary Certificate of Education (PCE) at the end of Primary six for entry to secondary one, Penilaian Menengah Bawah (PMB) at the end of secondary three for entry to secondary four and the Brunei-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (BGCE 'O' Levels) at the end of secondary five for entry to tertiary education or the workplace (see Appendix 5 & 6). The school places great emphasis on preparing the students for these exams.

#### 4.8.5 English language learning system in the secondary classroom

Each English language teacher writes up a scheme of work at the beginning of the year that serves as a guideline to what topics and activities they intend to carry out and teach throughout the school year (see Appendix 8). This scheme of work is based on the syllabus provided by the Ministry of Education for the English subject at the different levels. The scheme of work shows how each topic is divided into teaching and learning components such as grammar, writing, reading comprehension, vocabulary and so forth, references or textbooks to be used and also the duration for each topic. According to the teachers, they do not discuss, or consult each other about, their scheme of work. Each teacher draws up her own work schedule according to what she thinks needs to be covered for the classes she is taking. As a result, there are overlaps in topics among the different levels.



Students in secondary 2, for example, could be taught indirect and direct speech, and this is repeated in secondary 3 and 4. There is a departmental Head of English, but from the interviews with her, it appears that she interferes as little as possible with how the other English language teachers carry out their teaching or plan their scheme of work.

Teachers adhere to their scheme of work strictly and are strongly encouraged to complete whatever has been planned in the scheme before the major assessments and exams. In a way, the teachers feel that unless they complete what they had set out to do, their students will not be properly prepared for the exams. Students, on the other hand, have no say in the overall learning of the English language. They are not asked to participate in the decisions regarding their language learning. The scheme of work is planned and executed exclusively by the teachers.

From this scheme of work, teachers write out their daily lesson plans - that is what they wish to cover in a particular lesson. These lesson notes are written in the teacher's record book (see Appendix 9). A study of the lesson notes shows that teachers divide up their teaching into parts. For example, Monday is grammar day, Tuesday composition, Wednesday vocabulary and so forth. Usually, they use the two block periods (70-minute lessons) for composition writing and reading comprehension because students are expected to do more during these periods. All the teachers feel that it is easier and more systematic to plan their lessons in this way. By teaching the language in discrete parts, they will know exactly what they have covered and what has not been covered. Thus, it becomes less confusing for them and also for students, who will then know what books to bring for what day.

The lesson notes are very brief with a sentence about the topic to be taught and the textbook used. There are no explanations about the objectives of the lesson, how the topic will be carried out or the activities students are required to do. Teachers are not required to write evaluation remarks after each lesson. They write their lesson notes at the beginning of each week for the rest of that week and hand in their record books to the office once a week for checking by the deputy and assistant principals. Once every few weeks, they are required to submit their students' written work to the assistant principal for checking. Apart from

evaluating the students' progress, the checking of students' work also provides an opportunity for the administrators to assess the teacher's performance.

#### 4.8.6 Discipline

In order to achieve its commitment towards academic excellence, the school expects total collaboration from teachers and students with the overall school educational objectives and goals. Students are expected to exhibit good moral conduct and appropriate behaviour and be well-disciplined. They must show respect for their teachers, fellow students, elders and the properly constituted and legitimate authorities. A large part of this respect is to show unquestioning obedience towards their teachers in and out of the classroom and to abide by the rules and regulations of the school.

#### Summary

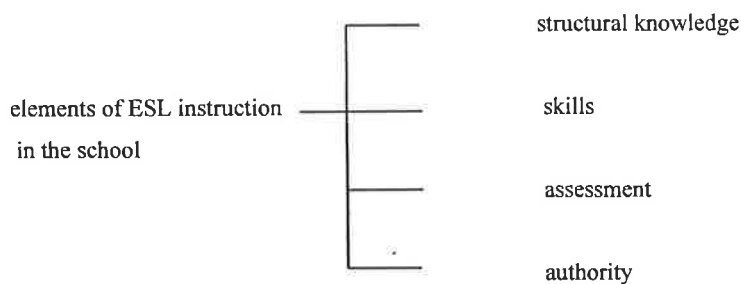
This chapter begins by providing geographical information about Brunei. It then goes on to trace the gradual significance of English as a second language in Brunei from the time it was a British protectorate to its independence in 1984 and the introduction of the Dwibahasa policy in schools. A review of the current research literature in English language teaching in Brunei shows that studies are limited to those looking at language classrooms per se. These studies show the English language classroom to be traditional in terms of teaching and learning methods. The ESL situation in the upper secondary classroom remains largely unexplored, in terms of how English as a subject is being taught and learnt within the school system. As a result, no definite conclusions can be reached at the moment. A clearer picture can only come about with in-depth, qualitative research into the ESL situation in schools. This has so far not been forthcoming. The second part of the chapter introduces the school selected for this research study. Detailed information of the school structure is given, with particular attention given to its English language program in the secondary language classrooms.

## Chapter 5

### The perception of a socio-cultural structure in ESL formal instruction

#### 5 Introduction

Following a careful review of the interview transcripts, supported by school documents and field notes taken, significant patterns have been noted down and then compiled into defining categories in an attempt to discover the socio-culture of the ESL instruction within the school context. The findings are conceptualized into the framework presented in Fig. 5.1.



*Fig 5.1 The ESL socio-cultural elements of language instruction in the school*

From Fig 5.1, ESL instruction in the school is seen to be composed of four main elements. One is the mastery of structural knowledge. That is to say that one objective in learning the English language is to achieve a sound abstract knowledge of its basic structural aspects. Second, language instruction also seems to be concerned with the achievement of specific linguistic skills. Achievement in the English language is measured in terms of how well students perform in particular skills advocated by the school. The third element is assessment, where language is seen to be measurable in real and concrete terms. The assessment is in the form of tests and examinations carried out regularly throughout the school year including national and externally marked written exams. Students are tested

on various aspects of the target language. Their results are then graded for promotional purposes or entry into tertiary studies either locally or abroad. Finally, language learning was seen to occur within a complex structure of authority. In particular, higher status is accorded to a particular code, which in turn creates a hierarchical organization of power among the members within the school community.

This brief introduction sets the tone for the rest of this chapter, which is devoted to providing comprehensive and detailed findings for each of these four main elements. Finally, based on the findings, a discussion will be carried out to make sense of how they all contribute to ESL learning within the school context.

### 5.1. Language as structural knowledge

From transcripts of interviews with the principal, teachers and student groups, supported by teachers' lesson notes, teachers' record books and students' written work in the classroom, the different aspects of the English language taught and learnt are noted. The notes are then reviewed and compiled into defining categories such as grammar (syntactical structures such as sentence structure, word class), vocabulary (word building, word formation, word usage) and speech (intonation, punctuation). A frequency count is then carried out on the number of occurrences within each category. These were then expressed in percentage terms. The findings are presented in Table 5.2.

Analysis of the data yields three broad categories of language aspects taught and learnt, namely (i) grammar, (ii) vocabulary and (iii) speech. Included within the grammar category are word classes, for example tenses, verbs, adjectives, and so forth, word formation, sentence construction and punctuation. Within vocabulary, are definitions of words and phrases, contextual/non-contextual usage of words and word building. In the speech category, there are for example, slang, intonation and stress.

aspects of L2	Principal	Teachers	Students
Grammar	73%	79%	75%
Vocabulary	18%	19%	20%
Speech	9%	2%	5%

*Table 5.2 Frequency of occurrence of the aspects of English taught and learnt in the school expressed in percentage terms*

From Table 5.2, grammar is found to be highly frequent with 79% occurrence from the principal, 79% frequency recorded for teachers and 75% for students. The lowest frequency of occurrence is in speech with 9% from the principal, 2% from teachers and 5% from students. The significant difference in interval among the three linguistic aspects for each group (73%:18%:9% ; 79%:19%:2% ; 75%:20%:5% ) suggests that they are viewed as discrete parts of the language and therefore independent of one another. It has to be noted here that the percentage of occurrence is an estimated frequency allowing for the overlapping use of such terms from the different sources.

Furthermore, a list is made of all the instances of specific grammatical expressions in the interview transcripts in all three groups. This is followed by a frequency count to find out the particular aspects of grammar prevalent in the instruction within the school. The results are presented in Table 5.3.

Two levels of grammar are categorized based on the data analysis. The first level is the sentence level. This includes the use of (i) particular word classes in sentences. Examples of word classes given are verbs, nouns, tenses, word formation such as suffixes, prefixes, compound words, and (ii) sentence re-ordering, construction, re-expression and structure.


Grammar aspects	frequency of occurrence (in %)
Sentence level	91%
text level	9%

Table 5.3 Frequency of occurrence of grammar aspects

The second level looks at grammar from the text level. This consists of looking at chunks of language, for example the structure and function of various phrases such as the verb and noun phrases and also the different types of clauses such as subordinating and coordinating clauses.

From Table 5.3, 91% of the grammar taught is at the sentence level with 9% at the text level. This suggests that far greater efforts are put into teaching grammatically correct sentences rather than looking at how grammar is being used in texts. This finding is supported by an interpretative analysis of students' written work in the classroom and notes for teachers stated in the teachers' record books. This is presented in Fig 5.4.

document 1a: subject verb agreement

exercise items	notes for interpretation
1. none of us <u>has</u> seen him 2. everyone <u>was</u> frightened when he saw a tiger 3. neither man <u>has</u> come 4. everybody <u>has</u> a hat	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discrete</li> <li>• decontextualised</li> </ul> grammatical units

document 1b: relative pronouns

exercise items	notes for interpretation
<p>5 (a) The men have gone home for lunch.  (b) They work at the garage here.  (a+b) <i>The men <u>who</u> work at the garage here have gone home for lunch.</i></p> <p>6 (a) Is that the boy?  (b) He saved the child from drowning.  (a+b) <i>Is that the boy <u>who</u> saved the child from drowning?</i></p>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; height: 150px; margin-right: 10px;"></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•discrete</li> <li>• decontextualised sentence construction</li> </ul> </div>

document 2: notes for teachers taken from teachers' record books

<p>The following are some of the most important points to be observed in teaching the various subjects.</p>	
<p>Grammar: (a) function or uses of words  (b) formation of sentences  (c) analysis of sentences  (d) lessons based on collected and classified common errors in composition  (e) practical – an aid to composition</p>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; height: 100px; margin-right: 10px;"></div> <p>formation, function, analysis and correction at sentence level</p> </div>

*Fig 5.4 An interpretive analysis of the students' English written exercises and school guidelines for grammar instruction*

In Fig. 5.4, documents 1a and 1b are written exercises taken from students' workbooks (see Appendix 7a & 7b). In both documents, the objectives are to test students' knowledge of subject-verb agreement and use of relative pronouns. This is done through filling in the blanks with the correct form of the verb in document 1a and reordering of sentences using the correct relative pronouns in document 1b. The sentences in these exercises are independent of one another and do not appear to occur within a context. Thus, in document 1a, there does not appear to be any connection between not having seen a man and meeting a tiger and the information that everyone has a hat. Similarly, in document 1b, there seems to be

a disconnection between workmen going home for lunch and a boy saving a child from being drowned. It is apparent that here, students are required to read each sentence and put in the correct answer or reconstruct the sentence correctly.

Document 2 consists of a set of guidelines on English teaching from the administration to the teachers (see Appendix 11). Expressions such as “words” and “sentences” in the document suggest an emphasis on grammar at the sentence level. Moreover, based on a review of the overall contents of the document, it reflects a perception that a sound knowledge of the form, function and analysis of the L2 at the sentence level will result in students writing better compositions. What this suggests is that more attention paid to grammar work will invariably raise the standard of English language proficiency among students.

Finally, perceptions of grammar instruction are gathered from interview transcripts and also field notes of conversations with the various participants during the research period. Data from the different perspectives are then reviewed and analysed. It is possible to conceptualise them in a tabulated form as shown in Table 5.5.

Assessment value	Participants						
	P	T1	T2	T3	SG1	SG2	SG3
Importance	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Impact	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y

Key: P = principal  
 T1 = teacher 1  
 T2 = teacher 2  
 T3 = teacher 3  
 SG1 = student group 1  
 SG2 = student group 2  
 SG3 = student group 3  
 Y = yes  
 N = no

*Table 5.5 Assessing participants' perceptions of grammar instruction in the school*

From Table 5.5, grammar is given two assessment values. One is to examine the importance of grammar teaching within the overall ESL learning in the school. That is to say how important do the participants think grammar is to success in L2 learning. The other value is assessed by the impact of grammar teaching on learners. Has the grammar being taught been successfully applied by learners to their language learning?



All the participants, with the exception of two student groups, believe grammar to be an important aspect of ESL learning. From the interview transcripts (see Appendix 12), the principal sees “a knowledge of grammar” as one of the main objectives of L2 learning in the school. Teacher 1 views “the correct usage of grammar” to be the main part of L2 learning. Moreover, she feels that students “must be told, what is agreement? What is article?” Both Teachers 2 and 3 confess that they “still go back to some of the traditional ways, like grammar teaching” because “it’s easier to teach” and because grammar teaching is important. The lower secondary students (SG3) feel that grammar “is easy actually and it’s like one of the most important, you know, when you’re learning English”.

When it comes to assessing the impact of grammar teaching, the principal records a “yes”. He feels that grammar has a great impact on the exam performance: “what are the exams? Grammar, essays, not much oral ...”. All three teachers do not think that grammar teaching has a great impact on learners because students do not appear to apply all the grammar work done in the other aspects of the L2:

“ when you ask them (students) why don’t you use it (grammar) in composition as such and comprehension, they said ‘I know no way of using these words’” (T1)

“students generally do not have problems with their work if topics are tested separately, but when they are put into context, students have problems applying what they learnt.” (field notes dd. 4.09.01: T2 evaluation of grammar lesson)

“the drawback I face is, they (students) do not apply this (grammar) in their written work” (T3)

Of the three student groups, two groups of higher secondary students (SG1 and SG2) feel that the grammar work they do in class is boring, difficult to grasp and meaningless:

“it’s (grammar) just too many rules and stuff ...I think grammar is a bit hard to understand ... it (grammar) doesn’t make sense and we still don’t get it ... I use the words like so simple, but when you put them together, you get it wrong” (SG1)

“it’s kind of boring, sometimes, you know, grammar, vocab, grammar, vocab ... one lesson about 20 sentences ... because you know all this written work, if it makes sense to you, then it’s o.k.” (SG2)

The general conclusion that can be made from Table 5.5 is that although the majority of the interviewees do acknowledge the importance of grammar in English language learning, they are less optimistic about the practical usefulness of the classroom grammar instruction.

## 5.2 Language skills

From interview transcripts with the principal, teachers and groups of students, expressions that related to or collocated with language skills are noted, listed and then sorted into categories. This is followed by a frequency count to find out which skills receive most attention. The results appear in Table 5.6.

It is found that the types of skills mentioned fall under two broad categories, namely (i) discrete skills where each skill is viewed as separate and independent from the other skills and (ii) integrative skills.

Types of skills	% of frequency
<i>Discrete skills</i>	92%
Writing (45%)	
Reading (29%)	
Speaking (15%)	
Listening (3%)	
<i>Integrative skills</i>	8%

*Table 5.6 Frequency of mention of language skills*

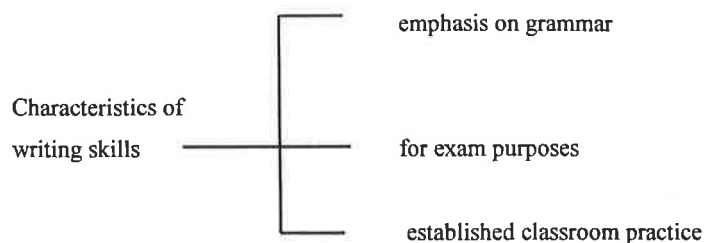
Here, the different skills are seen to be interwoven and thus operating as part of a whole process. From Table 5.6, discrete skills consist of writing, reading, speaking and listening. Within the writing skills are composition writing, summary writing and grammar writing. Reading subsumes reading for answering questions, for interpretation, for analysis and reading for pleasure. Taken into account in speaking are spontaneous talk, reading aloud and verbal discussions. For listening, there were listening comprehension and following oral instruction activities. Integrative skills are composed of the various communicative activities such as group discussions, debates and role plays where there is an integration of the four language skills.

The results shown in Table 5.6 suggest that there is much greater emphasis placed on discrete skills (92%) than integrative skills (8%). Within the discrete skills, the writing skill receives the most mention (45%) while listening skills are mentioned least by all participants (3%). The attention paid to the writing skill is supported by an interpretive analysis of interview transcripts shown in Fig. 5.7.

Extracts from transcripts	Interpretation
<p>(a) 'O' Levels, 'A' Levels, what is needed? comprehension and <u>writing of essays</u>. the oral is a very small part... <u>writing is very different, you've got to learn the structure, the grammar, to spell</u> (P)</p>	<p>writing for exams</p> <p>grammatically correct</p>
<p>(b) they (students) ask for it (group work) every time you go in. and I suppose it's one way of <u>getting out of writing</u>, getting out of sitting there and listening and <u>getting away from homework</u> (T1)</p>	<p>students' dislike of written work</p>
<p>(c) rather than familiarity... let them talk... <u>it doesn't work, not in their writing, not in their writing</u> (T2)</p>	<p>writing for accuracy</p>
<p>(b) and of course, the written part, we train them for <u>continuous writing in Paper 1</u> (T3)</p>	<p>writing summaries for exams</p>
<p>(c) we do <u>a lot of written work</u>...like <u>write, write, write</u>. but she doesn't give like a lot, it's like she spaces it out... but sometimes we <u>write too much</u>... one lesson <u>about 20 sentences</u> ... <u>written work don't do much for me</u> because you know all this written work... yah, it's like we're <u>wasting our time</u> writing down and she's like reading it and like writing, so it's like a waste of time (SG2)</p>	<p>massive amount of written work</p> <p>written grammar exercises</p> <p>written work is meaningless</p>

*Fig 5.7 Interpretive analysis of writing skills in the English language*

From the analysis above, it is possible to show that writing skills contain a few significant characteristics. This is illustrated in Fig. 5.8.



*Fig.5.8 Characteristics of the writing skills*

Both Figs. 5.7 and 5.8 suggest that writing skills are based on structural competence, the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences. Thus, a good deal of attention is paid to giving students vast amounts of grammar work in the form of written exercises. Moreover, the purpose for promoting the writing skills appears to be helping students pass the exams. Therefore, specific skills like summary writing and producing accurate comprehension answers are practised. From the comments by all the participants in Fig. 5.7, it is also apparent that written work is an established classroom practice. From the students' comments, however, the written work they do is meaningless and "a waste of time".

This brings us back to Table 5.6, where it is found that integrative skills recorded a frequency occurrence of 8%. A functional analysis of the interview transcripts is carried out to find out the reasons behind this infrequent occurrence. Extracts of data are presented in Fig. 5.9.

From the analysis in Fig. 5.9, two main interpretations could be made. First, it appears that the principal, teachers and students are all aware of the importance of communicative skills. The principal, for example, considers the promotion of integrative skills to be ideal for communication purposes.

extracts of interview transcripts

analysis

a. communicative skills ... more ideal and so in developed, advanced countries like Hong Kong and Singapore where language is used for communication	}	(i) communicative skills ideal in L2 acquisition
b. but here, in a lot of ways, it is used for academic purposes		(ii) may not work in academic learning
c. that's a very big thing you've got to have in mind		
d. they (students) like it (group work) very much	}	(i) group work is not dull
e. when you're in a group, you talk certain things		
f. if they're relevant can always come out in your written work		(ii) helpful to L2 learning
g. it is not a total waste of time		
h. communicative (most important aspect in L2 learning) skills in a way communicative. but they need the written work as well	}	(i) communicative skills are very important
i. actually, compo, I like to do more interactive work and more of them doing something than just writing but this is a weak class and it's a rowdy class I stop myself from doing too many activities you see, they can get rowdy (T2)		(ii) not practised in class because of poor discipline and weak students
j. there's no chance at all (to do creative activities) .. it's overcrowded. there's no place for them to move around.	}	(i) conditions not so appropriate for promoting creative skills
k. they're (students) very conscious of themselves, so they don't let go		
l. you require the child ... not being conscious of his ownself (T3)		
m. you can't actually, ah, improve your skills by doing tests	}	(i) promotion of other more interactive skills needed
n. instead do research on your own with friends, projects given		
o. usually people improve their skills by doing research and other stuff (SG1)		
p. I wouldn't mind if they put in activities like group activities like talk and acting but I think we should do more more communicating during English if we have have more periods ... seriously I think (SG2)	}	(i) communicative skills have not been promoted
		(ii) desire for more communicative activities

*Fig 5.9 Functional analysis of interviewees' comments on integrative language skills*

All three teachers believe that an incorporation of integrative skills can help in the overall language learning process. Students feel that language learning should involve communicative activities, like group discussions and role-plays, where they get to communicate with one another in the target language.

The second interpretation that can be made from the analysis is that that there is inadequate attention paid to integrative skills in the classroom. There was no evidence of students being engaged in discussion or tasks that allow them to actively use all the four language skills at one time. According to the principal, integrative skills do not relate to the academic purpose of the school. He points out the difference between learning a language academically and learning it for communicative purposes. In the school context, the former rules and therefore it may be difficult to place the relevance of promoting integrative skills in such a context. The teachers feel that they cannot carry out integrative or communicative activities because of the large classes and poor discipline. Moreover, as pointed out by T3, students are on the whole very shy and it is difficult for them to “let go”. The students feel that there should be more interactive activities like group discussion, talk and drama during English lessons. Their comments suggest that there is very little opportunity for them to actively use the target language in the language classroom.

### 5.3 Assessment

Based on a review of the interview transcripts, it is found that the assessments and tests are aligned to the G.C.E. ‘O’ Level papers that students sit for at the end of their secondary school years. A summary of the G.C.E. ‘O’ Level English Language papers is carried out and then analysed interpretatively. The findings are presented in Fig. 5.10.

Papers	Mode	Weighting	Tasks set	Marking Criteria
Composition	written	42%	(i) narrative writing	(i) accurate language (ii) sentence structure (iii) planning
Comprehension	written	42%	(ii) interpretation (iii) paraphrasing	(iv) precision (v) organisation (vi) accurate language
Orals	oral	16%	(iv) reading aloud (v) guided conversation	(vii) pronunciation (viii) stress (ix) intonation (x) pitch (xi) fluency

*Fig. 5.10 An analysis of the marking scheme for the B.G.C.E. 'O' Level English Language papers.*

The analysis of the G.C.E. 'O' Level exam papers are divided into five columns. The first column consists of the different types of papers contained in the exam, such as composition, comprehension or oral papers. The second column shows the mode or channel of assessment, whether is it performed through the written mode, speaking mode and so forth. The third column is about the grades allocated to each paper which add up to a total of 100%. The fourth column contains a description of the tasks that students are expected to perform for each paper and the final column looks at the criteria used by examiners when marking these papers.

From Fig. 5.10, students are assessed in three main areas - composition writing, reading comprehension and orals. The composition paper is divided into two parts. Part One consists of about four topics out of which students must choose one and write about the topic in not more than 600 words. The second part contains information regarding a certain situation, and students are expected to write about the situation in about 200 words. The reading comprehension paper is based on a reading passage of about 500 words. The question paper is divided into



two parts. One part consists of a number of questions that require students to extract information from the reading passage and the second part is the summary writing. Here, students are told to refer to certain sections of the passage and then rewrite these sections in their own words, not exceeding 160 words. The third paper is the orals. Here, there are three parts. The first is a reading passage of about 150 words and students are required to read the passage aloud. The second part contains a topic that students will be familiar with. A discussion similar to a semi-structured interview is then carried out with the examiners as interviewers and students as interviewees. In the final part, students are shown a picture and then invited to talk as freely and as much as they can about the picture.

Two out of the three papers are in the written mode that is the composition and comprehension papers. Moreover, a higher weighting of marks is given to the written papers (88%) than the orals (16%). This suggests that more importance has been given to writing and comprehension skills than the oral skills. The tasks set appear to test students in three main areas: writing skills, interpretation and paraphrasing of written texts. The main type of writing skill is the narrative where students are asked to relate a story or describe a situation or experience. In the reading comprehension paper, the main areas of assessment appear to be in interpretation and paraphrasing. Fig. 5.11 shows an analysis of questions taken from the mock exam paper (a past year G.C.E. 'O' Level paper) set in 2001 at Form 4 level.

	Questions	Analysis
(i)	In your own words, <u>explain the phrase</u> 'of the thirties' (line 2)	<i>[explanation of phrase]</i>
(ii)	<u>What is meant</u> by 'eloquent words' (line 26)	<i>[definition of phrase]</i>
(iii)	The first paragraph tells us of a change in the father's behaviour. <u>Describe in your own words ...</u>	<i>[paraphrasing of paragraphs]</i>
(iv)	<u>What is meant</u> by saying that the father was 'quite overcome' (line 26)?	<i>[definition of phrase]</i>
(v)	<u>Give one word or short phrase</u> (of not more than 7 words) <u>which has the same meaning</u> as the words used in the passage: (1) Peculiar (line 11)	

(2) Fatiguing (line 15)	<i>[definition of words]</i>
(i) Suppose the author's father were to write in his diary an account of what happened after he decided to take his family out for that Sunday drive. <u>Write a summary</u> relating only to the events that occurred. Use only material from line 26 to line 74.	<i>[summarising sections of the reading passage]</i>

*Fig 5.11 An analysis of examples of questions in Paper 2 (reading comprehension) for mock exam 2001*

The questions in Fig. 5.11 follow a reading passage (see Appendix 6b: paper 2). It is observed that most of the interpretation questions are based on definitions at the word or phrase level: “explain the phrase”, “what is meant”, “give one word or short phrase....which has the same meaning”. Students are required to make explicit certain words, expressions or phrases in the reading passage. The most common type of paraphrasing is the summary writing where students are asked to “describe in your own words” certain sections of the passage and “write a summary” using material from certain parts of the passage.

From Fig. 5.11, the criteria for marking the papers appear to be based on structure and content. Two kinds of structure are suggested here. One is accuracy of grammatical structure, such as sentence ordering, punctuation and spelling. The other is the way paragraphs and answers are organized and planned. Content refers to the relevance of answers to the topic or question asked. Thus, in composition writing students are assessed on whether they have addressed the topic in their writing. In reading comprehension, content is evaluated in terms of precision of answers; the more precise the answer, the higher the mark.

It may be appropriate here to find out what the administrators, teachers and students think about assessment of L2 learning within the school set-up. Fig. 5.12a shows extracts of data taken from the interview transcripts. These are then subjected to a textual analysis to find out what administrators, teachers and students think about the assessment. Bracketing shows the clauses under study while the underlining within these clauses operates to highlight the perceptions of the interviewees. The symbols (+), (-), (X) and (v) represent the value descriptors

of the exams derived from the perceptions gathered. These will be further explained in Fig. 5.12b directly following from Fig. 5.12a.

(+) (X) [ pressure in the sense of examination results]. there's always ... maybe it's an Asian concept in this part of the world.

(+) (X) [ Everything depends on exam results] (T1)

(+) (v ) [ well, an exam is also good] because if students know that [there is no exam they'll never study, you see]

(+) (X) [ they (admin) think exams are very important], [partly to get high marks].  
[ the school will be no. 1 and 2.]

(+) (X) [ of course, it reflects well] when the school does well (T2)

(-) (X) [ so here, we hardly do the real aspect of language ...]

(-) (X) [ it is only for ... the main objective, the "O" levels]

(-) (X) [ so personally, I'm not game for it (assessment)] but

(+) (X) when it comes to sitting for the paper, [I have to do justice to the students] (T3)

(conversation with the deputy principal: field notes dd 3.09.2001)

(+) (v ) [ a good teacher is one who brings about good results from the students]

(+) (v ) [ differentiates 'good' and 'poor' teachers by the exam results]

(+) (X) you see, [it's the exams that dictate the teachers, how to teach, what to teach... ]  
teacher's approach is very exam oriented

(+) (v ) [ it (teaching) produces exam results] and [ parents want that]. [ children want that]. [ they want their certificates]. [ they want their grades], that's all (P)

(+) (v ) [ I think it should be good]. [ it keeps us revising our work]

(+) (v ) [ I like assessments though...]

(+) (v ) [ having assessments is actually good,] cos' like for, you sit for your mid-year or final exams, [ you can like improve your studies more through assessments in English]

(+) (X) [ we don't like it] because when we get bad marks, it's like 'oh!'] (SG3)

(+) (X) [ a torture.] I mean, o.k. sometimes we get really ... I can't say  
I'm happy with my marks. I'm not happy with my marks

(+) (v ) [ it's not that bad ...]

(-) (X) [ I just don't get the point of having English assessments] ... because you know,

you talk in English, you know, maybe you write, but it's just that [I don't understand why you should test like that] (SG2)

- (+) (X) [ the thing I don't get is the comprehension.] every assessment test we have comprehension
- (-) (X) [ actually it's not necessary to give us exams.] [you can't, ah, improve your skills by doing tests]
- (+) (X) [ waste of time]. just [striving to get good marks...]
- (+) (X) [ composition, orals or grammar, that might help, but not comprehension]
- (+) (X) I don't study for the exams, [just enough to go to the next level...]
- (-) (X) [even if I get good marks], lots of English, [we still don't understand] (SG1)

Fig 5.12a A textual analysis of participants' perceptions of assessment in English language learning

In analysing the interviewees' perceptions, consideration is given interpreting what is said and also what is perceived. Fig. 5.12a is tabulated and presented as shown in Fig. 5.12b.

In Fig. 5.12b, the interviewees' perceptions are divided into two descriptive indicators - significance and usefulness of assessment. Significance here refers to how important interviewees think the language assessment is within the school context while usefulness refers to the how effective they think such assessment is in measuring language achievement.

interviewees	Significance (in %)		Usefulness (in %)	
	(+)	(-)	(v )	(X)
principal	100%	-	75%	25%
teachers	78%	22%	11%	89%
students	79%	21%	29%	71%

Key: (+) highly significant (v ) highly useful  
 (-) not highly significant (X) not useful

Fig. 5.12b Interviewees' perceptions of assessment in English language learning

So a (+) indicates that assessment is very significant while a (-) indicates low significance. A (v) shows assessment to be very useful in gauging language learning while a (X) shows that it is not useful.

To the administrators, the assessment is thought to be both highly significant (100%:0) and very useful (75%:25%). They think the assessment to be highly significant because parents and students want it. It is useful because exams produce certificates and grades that are important for promotion purposes and further studies and employment. According to the deputy principal, the assessment is also a useful tool for assessing “good” and “poor” teachers.

Teachers view the assessment as highly significant (78%:22%). They think that teaching for the exams is significant because the school demands it:

everything (in school) depends on exam results

they (the administration) think exams are very important... the school will be No. 1 and 2

it reflects well when the school does well

and often because the students demand it:

when it comes to sitting for the papers, I have to do justice to the students

language exams they (students) take seriously because many of them have aspirations to go overseas

majority are ‘O’ level students, exam-minded students, yes

However, the teachers feel that the assessment is not a useful way to measure L2 learning (89%:11%). Among the reasons given are that exams and assessments

put unnecessary pressure on teaching and so teachers find themselves not dealing with the real aspects of language:

pressure in the sense of examination results

so here, we hardly do the real aspect of language, you know what I mean

Similarly, the students respond with a high score for significance (79%:21%), but a low score for usefulness of the language assessment (71%:29%). Moreover, indication of the perceived significance of assessments are often hidden in negative statements, especially from those in the upper levels:

a torture... I can't say I'm happy with my marks...

composition, orals or grammar, that might help, but not comprehension

waste of time... just to get higher grades

yeah... just enough to go to the next level

So, while they think exams are “a torture” and “a waste of time”, they are significant for getting good grades, for class promotions. Furthermore, an interpretation made from the interview transcripts in Fig. 5.12a shows that, although most students say that the assessments are not useful, they do not appear to say that all language assessments are useless, only the types they are required to undergo.

#### 5.4 Authority

When it comes to looking at authority in L2 learning within the school context, it is possible to perceive from the interview transcripts that there are two main forms of categories of authority as shown in Fig. 5.13.

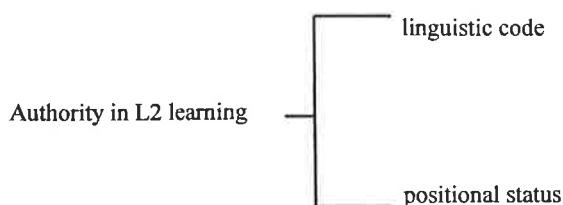


Fig 5.13 The main categories of authority in language instruction in the school

From Fig. 5.13, one form of authority relates to the existence of an authoritative linguistic code being promoted in the school, an observation that will be looked at in the next paragraph section. The other form of authority is the positional status of administrators, teachers and students in the school. This is signalled in terms of the power relations existing among the different groups in the school, namely the administration, the teachers and students. Each group is assigned, whether consciously or not, a certain amount of power over another on the basis of the roles they are expected to play within the framework of educational goals and objectives in L2 learning.

A combination of content and functional analysis of the interview transcripts is carried out to find out which aspects of the target language are perceived as having more prestige or value. The linguistic codes used in the school can be narrowed down to the two main types presented in Fig. 5.14.

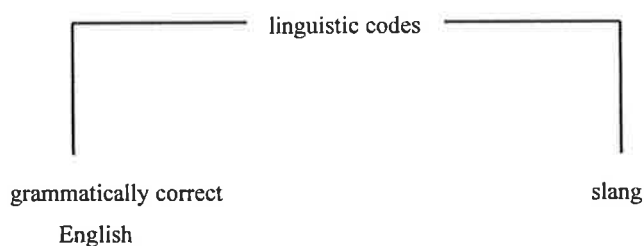


Fig. 5.14 Distinguishing the possible types of linguistic codes of the target language

The two types of linguistic codes mentioned are grammatically correct English and slang. Grammatically correct English is used to refer to the formal and proper English usage advocated by school authorities and teachers both in speech and writing. Slang, on the other hand, refers to the everyday informal, casual spoken

language, with a strong dose of colloquial expressions and structure. In addition, an interpretative analysis is carried out on the interview transcripts to show the participants' perceptions of the two linguistic codes. This is presented in Table 5.15.

From the interpretive analysis in Table 5.15, grammatically correct English is seen to be a prestigious code. Being able to speak proper English is perceived to be the mark of high education and status. Moreover, it appears that an in-depth knowledge of grammar will place a person within the educated elite. The use of slang, on the other hand, is seen to be discouraged. It is perceived by the interviewees to have a low prestige. Students, however, claim that they use slang among themselves as it is a more personal, intimate communicative code. To students, slang is used frequently among peers but not to someone of higher authority, such as teachers.

Extracts of data	Interpretation
'grammar is more about learning English ...' (SG3)	grammar = L2 learning
'it's (grammar) like one of the most important, you know, when you're learning English' (SG3)	grammar = mastery
'we use slangs ... if you talk to the teacher, no. only if we talk among ourselves' (SG1)	slang = intimacy
'it's (proper English) helpful if you talk to those high class people ... principals, high commissioners' (SG1)	formal school language = high status
'if you say a slang to a teacher, they'll say 'why are you talking like this? Didn't your teacher teach you anything?'. she'll think that you're stupid and cannot speak proper English' (SG1)	slang = language of the uneducated
'... and they need to get their grammar right... ' (T2)	grammatically correct English = correct English
'and you see now, when people speak, they have a lot of mistakes in their grammar ... and you know, people who teach English and yet they go up and make such mistakes' (T1)	grammatically correct speech = high status

Table 5.15 An interpretation of participants' perceptions of the two linguistic codes



Returning to Fig. 5.13, the other form of authority mentioned frequently is that of manner, the relationships among the different groups within the school. A content analysis is carried out on the interview transcripts to provide more information about the power relations prevailing within the school. Expressions, words and phrases pertaining to authority are noted, reviewed and then collapsed into categories demonstrating the different levels of authority. In an attempt to further look at the power distance existing between the different levels, a frequency count (expressed in % terms) is carried out based on the number of times each type of authority is mentioned. The results are shown in Fig. 5.16.

Level of authority	Administrators	Teachers	Students
Classroom	32%	65%	97%
Institutional	68%	35%	3%

*Table 5.16 Power relationships among the administrators, teachers and students in the school*

In Table 5.16, an analysis of the interviewees' responses shows that it is possible to classify the existing authority as operating at two levels - classroom authority and institutional authority. At the classroom level, authority is seen in terms of the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom, namely class discipline and the perceived roles of teachers and students. Authority at the institutional level is concerned with the overall authority beyond that of the classroom and involves the triangular administrator-teacher-student relationship. This includes the perceived roles of the administration, school rules and regulations and the influence of outside forces such as parents, ministry, syllabus and curriculum department.

From Table 5.16, it can be suggested that teachers and students align themselves more to viewing authority as that which exists exclusively at the classroom level. The administrators, on the other hand, appear to see authority as operating at the higher institutional level. The big difference in interval between the two levels, especially between the administrators and the students suggests a remote and distant relationship between them.

In an attempt to examine the power relationships among the three groups, an interpretative analysis is carried out on the perceived roles each of these three groups are expected to play within the school. Data from interview transcripts are used, supported by field notes and school documents. The results are presented in Table 5.17.

Roles	Groups		
	Teachers	Students	Administrators
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to discipline</li> <li>• to instruct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to discipline</li> <li>• to instruct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to instruct</li> </ul>
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to respect</li> <li>• to obey</li> <li>• to submit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to respect</li> <li>• to obey</li> <li>• to be polite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to respect</li> <li>• to obey</li> </ul>
administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to set rules</li> <li>• to support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to command power</li> <li>• to be respected</li> <li>• to lead</li> </ul>

Table 5.17 Perceptions of roles of administrators, teachers and students in the school

Findings from Table 5.17 suggest that the main role of the teacher is that of an instructor. Moreover, for successful instruction to take place, teachers are seen to assume authority over classroom learning. A content analysis shows three areas of authority teachers are expected to hold in the classroom (see Fig. 5.18 below)

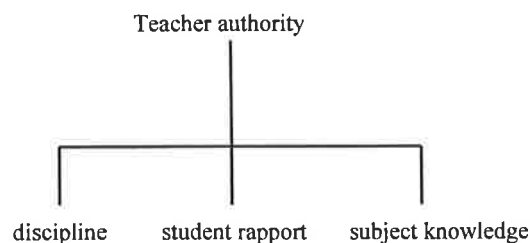


Fig 5.18 Areas of teacher authority in the classroom

Maintaining discipline is seen to be a requirement “so that there’s more order and system going on” (T2) and for maintaining class control because “if you don’t put your foot down, they become unruly” (T1). It appears that students also want their teachers to be strict, but in varying degrees: “she should be strict. she should

show discipline”(SG1); one “who’s not too strict, have a sense of humour” (SG3) and “more strict in the inside but outside you know, have fun” (SG2).

When it comes to forming rapport with their students, the findings show quite different, contradictory perceptions from all three groups. Teachers appear to prefer an impersonal relationship with their students. All three teachers talk about “maintaining a distance”, “to draw a line” and to “show the students his or her place”. From the principal’s viewpoint, if a teacher is “more democratic, the students are entertained, and the students feel that they are contributing, not being dictated or directed by the teacher all the time”. Students appear to want to have a closer relationship with their teachers in that “I think a teacher should be like interested in students individually like, um, should care about what they do outside also like we care for them... give us a shoulder” (SG1). She should also be “more open in that you can say what you want to say and the teacher won’t criticise you in any way, you know ... yah, you can talk to her about things and ask for advice” (SG2). Furthermore, students show that they prefer a teacher who understands them as in “a teacher should probably, like if we make a mistake, don’t get angry and start to chide them, saying they should know” (SG3).

From the findings, teachers are also expected to demonstrate their expertise in subject knowledge and therefore their authoritative position in the classroom. According to the principal, “if he (the teacher) has the skill ... a very experienced, very well educated personality, the personality can also control the students. He commands respect”. Teachers associate knowledge with respect. When they show that they know the subject well, they will earn the respect of their students. So “it’s good sometimes, you know, get them (students) to suggest (what to learn) but I think, the final say has still to come from the teacher” (T2); “whatever you tell them (the students), whatever you give them, they are willing to accept, because they feel the course of language learning is so vast...” (T1). Students also expect their teachers to be knowledgeable because “normally she give all the answers, if we answer wrongly and she says it’s correct, then she’s not qualified to be a teacher” (SG1). As such, they trust their teachers to direct them in their learning: “I would just leave it with the teacher because teacher will have more experience ... because having a teacher with you is like better than you learning it

yourself, cos' sometimes some problems may occur and you can't think of how to solve it'' (SG3).

When it comes to perceiving students' position within the school, all three groups record respect and obedience. It is felt that students should show respect towards their teacher and school authorities and obey whatever they are told to do: "whatever you tell them, they're willing to accept" (T1); "I am a peer, but I'm your teacher too. I earn your respect, maintain this .. a student is a student after all" (T3); "at the same time, they respect the teacher, they follow, they behave themselves" (principal). The students themselves appear to have accepted their position in the school without much resentment, judging by comments made by them during the group interviews: "well, I guess we have to respect the teacher" (SG1); "... you're supposed to do this, you're supposed to do that..." (SG2); "some of us have respect for the teacher ... like polite ... polite, obey the teacher ... don't be rude ... good behaviour, the teacher expects good behaviour ... not to talk back to the teacher" (SG3).

All three groups, however, do not appear to share a common perception of the role of the school administrators. For the teachers, the administrators set the rules, conditions and regulations for students to abide by. Conversations with teachers in the form of filed notes also suggest "that some kind of support from the administration should be encouraged". Teachers feel that this support is very important in maintaining their morale. To students, the school administration appears to be something remote and distant and they equate school administration with discipline: "if we talk too much, she (the teacher) might report to the discipline master" (SG3); "if you act wild in class, you will actually end up in the principal's office" (SG1). As the key player in the administration, the principal sees his role as that of a "leader of the school, he's also a monitor, evaluator, he's also a director ... he monitors, he must have a system of monitoring the whole school ... he must know what is going on ... he has to lead in many things" (principal).

Table 5.17 demonstrates a clear-cut and well-structured hierarchical order of authority among the three main groups of participants – the principal as the school administrator, the teacher and the students.

### 5.5 Discussion of findings

Results from the findings show four main socio-cultural elements behind the structure of ESL instruction in the school. This section contains an in-depth discussion of the findings. Each element will be discussed at some length. Finally, an attempt will be made to collate the discussion within a coherent framework that shows how these elements are organized to form the structure of formal ESL instruction in the school.

The findings suggest that within the school, the L2 is viewed in two ways: (i) not as a whole but as constituting neat, discrete linguistic parts of a whole, with each part quite independent of the other and (ii) that a lot more attention is paid to the acquisition of the structural aspects. Moreover, more importance is placed on these structural aspects than other aspects of the language. Of the structural knowledge, grammar appears to be given strong emphasis. Furthermore, from the interviews with all the three groups, the kind of grammar meant is grammar that is amenable to explicit teaching, involving instruction in abstracted and isolated rules of grammar units in the form of word classes and sentence construction. This confirms existing literature on language education which suggests that explicit grammar teaching is the norm of ESL instruction in the classroom (Ellis, 1993; Borg, 1999). The teachers claim that grammar provides the foundation to learning the language. It appears that their conception of grammar is that which operates at the sentence level. Thus, students find themselves working with massive amounts of isolated sentences which they are required to complete by filling in the blanks with a particular word class, or reordering sentences in various ways through the use of passive tenses, for example.

In many ways, attention is being paid to teaching language forms rather than language form. According to Long (1996), the former is instruction where units of grammar are taught in isolation while the latter incorporates grammar teaching

within a context. From the interviews with the teachers, it can be suggested that emphasis is placed on form rather than on meaning. In fact, there is very little evidence of the teaching of the functional grammar advocated by Halliday (1994). Instead of looking at meanings at text level, students spend most of their time slotting in the correct answers in incomplete sentences. Thus, grammar is learnt through expository teaching rather than through a process of discovery learning, which is perceived to produce better results (Shaffer, 1989). This places the teacher in the key position as the sole possessor of knowledge. A considerable amount of time is spent on teaching grammar explicitly, where topics are extracted and transmitted in isolation from the whole language. The justification for such teaching is because first, the teachers find it comfortable to teach grammar the way they have been taught and second, the feeling is that students need to know the grammar to write well. Writing well means writing in grammatically correct English, partly because this is the requirement for the assessment.

Whether students have actually grasped and used the grammar taught is questionable. The teachers themselves have conceded that students frequently do not apply what they have been taught, even after intensive drilling exercises. Despite their awareness that traditional grammar teaching may not be the best method, teachers persist with it. This may be because they know of no other way to teach grammar. Students, on the other hand, and especially those in the higher classes, find grammar to be particularly difficult perhaps because it is presented in such an abstract manner that it becomes difficult for learners to apply what they have learnt in meaningful contexts. So, while they know what the simple present tense or verbs are on their own, and may even slot in the correct tense or verb in sentences, when asked to identify or put these units of grammar in texts or within a context, they are lost.

What we can conclude from the findings is the considerable impact of explicit grammar instruction in English language learning in the school. To the teachers, a solid foundation in grammar is fundamental to achievement in L2 learning. While students complain that they cannot make sense of the grammar learnt in the classroom, there is nevertheless the general awareness that in order to be

proficient in the L2, they must master the grammar. Certainly, the significance of grammar knowledge in language learning has been acknowledged in other research work carried out in language education (Gorsuch, 2000; Doughty, 1998; Nunan 1998; Ellis, 1993; Littlewood, 1992). The question, as far as the findings in this study show, lies not so much in whether grammar is important in ESL teaching and learning, but in the method of grammar instruction in the classroom.

Apart from viewing language as consisting of discrete linguistic parts, ESL learning is also seen to be the mastery of discrete skills rather than integrative skills. Thus, the four basic language skills – writing, reading, speaking and listening – are taught as separate compartments quite independent of one another. Moreover, the skills are heavily academic and literary based. The promotion of reading skills, for example, is limited to getting students to read a literary text and then answer questions about the text. Critical reading skills are not promoted. Students are rarely asked to read an article or text and then comment on it. It appears that the skills taught are generally constrained to fit into the school requirements. Beyond this, it is questionable whether the skills may be relevant to the environment outside the school setting, such as in the workplace.

Furthermore, it is found that a lot more attention is paid to written skills than the other three types mentioned. This confirms Kramsch's (1998) view that academic discourse has traditionally been about written knowledge. From an analysis of interview data, it is quite clear that students are given massive amounts of written work in the classroom. Moreover, the most common types of written skills are the summarizing skills and the production of grammatically correct essays, again very academic in nature. There is very little creative writing or free expression. Perhaps this is because it is that much more difficult to assess these forms of writings than the purely academic types. It may not be easy, for example, to draw up an objective marking scheme (a clear preference for assessing students' language ability in the school) for creative writing largely because assessing what is right or wrong in this instance is a complicated and less clear-cut process.

Thus, students are drilled in academic writing skills where a high value is placed on the interpretative and paraphrasing skills in order to perform well in the

B.G.C.E. 'O' level papers at the end of the school year. While the emphasis on interpretation of texts is quite clear, little attention, however, has been paid to improving those information-processing skills that have assumed greater importance in today's information seeking world (Kramersch, 1998). In other words, people are now more concerned with being able to transmit, retrieve and exchange information through a variety of channels rather than to carry out interpretation and analyses of formal academic written texts.

More interesting is the observation that, although there is little evidence of integrative or communicative skills being carried out in the language classroom, the principal, teachers and students are all aware of the significance of such skills within the language learning process. All show a desire for more integrative activities that incorporate all the four language skills, activities such as role plays, group discussions, debates and so forth. In fact, the teachers interviewed are all in favour of activities that incorporate higher student participation in the classroom, supporting studies by Richards, Tung and Ng (1992) in the Hong Kong secondary language classroom.

In spite of their claims about the importance of integrative skills in English language learning, observations show that such skills are rarely promoted in the classroom. The expressed attitude about integrative skills is far different from actual practice. According to the principal, it is difficult to place communicative skills within the overall educational objectives of the school, particularly where the exams are concerned. Here, the emphasis is on the knowledge rather than the meaningful usage of the target language. Teachers, on the other hand, find it difficult to carry out communicative activities due to the large class size and discipline problems. Moreover, there is the underlying belief among them that students will not benefit from communicative activities unless they are already proficient in the language. Thus, there is the frequent comment made that such skills could only be successfully carried out in "good" language classes. In their view, in weaker classes, traditional teaching works better. These may be seen as valid reasons for the absence of an integrative approach to language teaching generally.



However, an important point that comes across during the interviews is that any promotion of communicative or integrative skills may require some degree of confidence in students' contribution in the target language. From the interview data, teachers appear to be torn between a desire for more active student roles in the classroom and a degree of reluctance for more student autonomy in learning. They feel that, left on their own, students will not know what to do or how to proceed. It is very clear that these teachers have their students' interests at heart, but do not have the confidence in their students to learn autonomously. More interestingly, the students themselves do not appear to be overly enthusiastic about assuming a more assertive role in their learning. Most of them were quite happy to submit to their teachers because according to them, the teachers were more experienced and knowledgeable and therefore knew what was best for them.

The results of the findings also show that the assessment has a significant influence on the socio-culture of English language teaching and learning in the school. Like many other Asian societies (Gorsuch, 2000; Cheah, 1998; Cheng, 1997), the school bases the success of its language program on the exam results of its students. Here, the assessment comes in the form of the externally marked B.G.C.E. 'O' levels English language papers that all secondary school students are required to sit for at the end of their secondary education. An analysis of the examination shows that when it comes to weighting of marks, emphasis is given to the written papers rather than oral skills. The minimal marks allocated to oral skills suggest that in language learning, speaking skills are less important than writing and reading skills and therefore not significant. The two written papers are divided into the comprehension paper (Paper 1) and composition paper (Paper 2). In Paper 1, students are tested on their ability to interpret meanings and summarise chunks of information from a reading passage. In Paper 2, they are tested on narrative writing, in the form of either writing an expository or a descriptive account of selected topics.

Furthermore, there appears to be a mismatch between what is being tested and the marking criteria. Although the guidelines for marking appear to be ambiguous and vague, they are based on grammatical and organizational structure. This is to say that grades are based more or less on the use of grammatically correct sentences

and the way answers are organized. If indeed these are the main considerations behind the marking criteria, it is quite easy to see the difficulty involved in coming up with a fair and just assessment. In narrative writing, for example, it is not clear whether allowances are being made for cultural nuances in such writing. Relating a story in the Australian context may be quite different from how stories are told in Africa, India or Singapore. Each may display a distinct linguistic structure quite different from the other. Moreover, and more importantly, the emphasis on grammatical and organizational structure may mean an oversight of creative, original and ingenious answers and writing. These papers are academic in terms of content and skills. It must be noted that the B.G.C.E. 'O' levels are given at the end of the secondary school years. Therefore, the skills and knowledge tested may be beneficial only to those who intend to go on to tertiary education either locally or abroad where academic skills are further developed. But, for the majority who will be going out to join the job market, it is questionable whether these exams are relevant, in the workplace.

When it comes to gathering their views on the language exams in the school, the interview transcripts from the three groups (the principal, teachers and students) provide some interesting observations and insights. Here, the assessment is analysed under the two distinguishing values of significance and usefulness. All three groups felt that the language assessment is significant, particularly because of its extrinsic rewards as far as the school was concerned. Good results are considered good for the school's image as an educational institution. They also mean class promotions, certificates for entry to higher education and happy parents. Furthermore, from the conversations with the deputy principal, assessments are also significant in that they provide a yardstick for measuring a teacher's competence.

However, two out of the three groups felt that the exams are not as useful in promoting L2 proficiency among learners. Apart from the administrators, the perception among teachers and students is that the existing assessments in the school are more a hindrance than help in the language learning process. Teachers claim that the exams have put unnecessary stress on their teaching. Moreover, they find themselves teaching mainly towards the exams that they feel do not

address the real aspect of language learning, aspects that enable students to engage in active production in the target language with a degree of confidence. As far as the students are concerned, they see little meaning in the language tests and exams. Particularly for reading comprehension, students claim that all they are required to do is to extract information that could easily be found in the reading passage. Many said that they do not study for the assessments because, unlike science or history, there is nothing to study when it comes to English. The general impression from the findings on language assessment is that, while all three groups believe in the impact of exams on L2 learning within the school system, they are more sceptical when it comes to the usefulness of the tasks being set in the assessments, tests and exam.

The findings also provide insights about English language learning as a subject in the school. It cannot be said to be content-based in the sense that history or science is content based, neither is it an art form in the sense of painting and craftwork. Language learning is uniquely different from these other subjects and therefore the question arises as to whether it should be subjected to the same kind of fact or knowledge based assessments commonly found in Maths or Science or even History.

When it comes to looking at authority in English language instruction within the school, the results show authority as existing in two areas – the recognition of a particular linguistic code as superior over other codes and the presence of a well-defined structure of authority among the different members of the school community. In addition, it appears that these two areas are not independent of each other but are related in such a way that authority in one area leads to authority in the other. Grammar knowledge is considered by the administrators, teachers and students to be important in order to speak and write in good, correct English. Speaking grammatically correct English is perceived as a symbol of a highly educated person. On the other hand, informal language or “slang” as the students call it, appears to be discouraged in the classroom. It is somehow instilled into students that “slang” or colloquial use of the English language represents the linguistic code of ignorant, uneducated people. So, while the students admit that

they are more comfortable when using “slang” with friends, they will never use it in front of their teachers.

The prestige and authority put on formal language use appear to have created a hierarchical structure of power relations within the school community. A clear division in authority is perceived between those who possess an academic knowledge of the L2 and those who seek it. In a sense, this supports Hotho’s (1998) argument for the existence of a hierarchical structure of authority in academic organizations. The findings suggest that a wide and deep chasm exists between authority at the institutional level and the classroom level. When power relations are looked at in terms of “power distance” Cotterall (1998:68), then it is possible to say that a large power distance exists, especially in the relationship between students and the administrators of the school. There is, in fact, very little communication between the administrators of the school and students. It is therefore not surprising that, apart from claiming the administration as having authority over their behaviour in school, students do not seem to have an idea of the goals and direction of the English language learning beyond the classroom level.

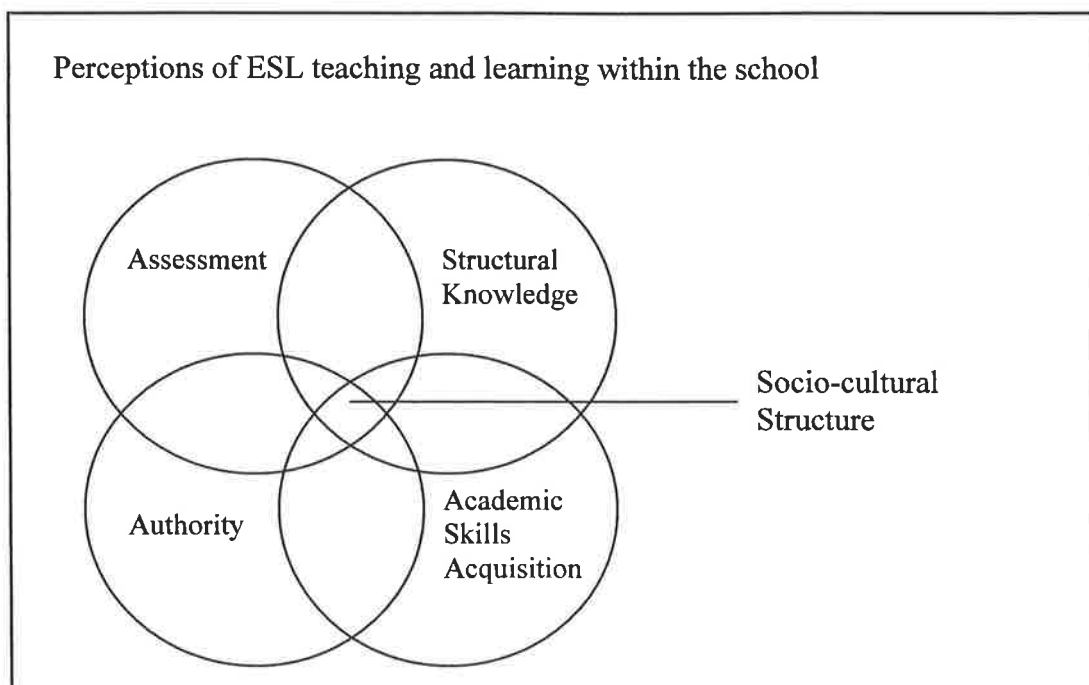
Furthermore, it appears that the teachers and the principal do not share similar perceptions of the administration’s role in the school. More than just setting rules for the conduct of teaching and learning the language, it appears that teachers also expect the administration to play a supportive role. They feel that support from the administration is paramount to boosting the teachers’ morale in what can sometimes be a difficult and stressful job. On the other hand, the principal, as the key player in the administration, sees his role as that of a chief executive in an organization who wields considerable power and commands considerable respect from his subordinates. Such a perception cannot but create a barrier between administrators and teachers. While he is quite clear about the principal’s position as a leader and monitor of the school, his perceptions of his role as supporter to his teachers have been less clear.

While perceptions of role distinctions at the higher levels in the school have been ambiguous, in the classroom, it is found that both teachers and students endorse strict classroom discipline. Teachers are expected to maintain good classroom discipline in the sense that they should be strict and firm in managing students' behaviour in class so that learning can take place. Both teachers and students also expect that teachers be very knowledgeable in the subject matter they are teaching. In fact, students make it quite clear in their interviews that they judge a teacher's competence by the amount of knowledge he or she exhibits in the classroom.

It is only in the area of teacher-student rapport that some contradictory findings are observed. Teachers feel that they should always maintain a distance when it comes to the relationship with their students. They fear that if they get too close or personal with their students, they will be taken advantage of. More importantly, they perceive that by maintaining an impersonal relationship, they are assured of their students' respect and therefore their own authority. Students, on the other hand, prefer a closer, more intimate relationship with their teachers. Most students interviewed express a desire for a caring and understanding teacher, someone they can speak to freely without fear of being criticized and belittled. These findings suggest a fragile and wary relationship between teachers and students in the school.

It appears that, among the three groups, the students' roles are seen to be the most clear cut and well-defined. They are expected to obey and respect all members who hold a higher authority within the school. They do not talk back to their teacher because it is considered rude and impolite to do so. Moreover, students are expected to accept everything taught by their teachers. The observation that students appear to accept their roles without much argument suggests that they have been socialized into a passive role within the school culture.

Finally, the various thoughts of the foregoing discussion are conceptualized within a coherent framework of ESL instruction in the school as presented in Fig. 5.19, which provides the focus of the rest of the discussion.



*Fig.5.19 The socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school context*

The rectangular frame shown in Fig. 5.19 represents the perceptions of ESL learning in the school context. These perceptions are gathered from the data found in interviews with the administrators, English language teachers and students in the school. Out of these perceptions generate the four main elements of L2 learning in the school - knowledge, skills, assessment and authority. From the analyses and interpretations carried out, it is suggested that these elements act as the socio-cultural norms and practices in ESL learning. By themselves, they are not independent entities, but are seen, instead, to be constantly interacting with one another. In a sense, they function as the social rules in ESL learning within the school. In addition, they do not appear to operate in a certain sequential order but appear to be linked to one another in an established circular fashion.

The emphasis on grammar knowledge has enabled the English language learning to be measured more objectively in the exams and assessments. One can imagine the difficulty of measuring student achievement if creativity in language learning is being given priority. Moreover, the present assessments and exams in the school are largely in the written mode with very little attention paid to oral skills. This has provided the rationale behind the almost exclusive promotion of written skills in the classroom. Written knowledge, the need to express grammatically correct

English in the formal written mode, is highly valued in language learning and assessment. The sanction given to written knowledge in the school has inevitably led to a distinct and well-defined hierarchy of authority in language learning. This authority is expressed in terms of a linguistic code perceived to be more superior than others. It is thought that the value placed on acquiring this particular code has highlighted an obvious difference in status and power between those who possess the knowledge and those who seek it.

More importantly, it is rationalized that these four elements do not just happen by chance, but have been constructed based on a transformation principle, much similar to Bernstein's (2000:33) "re-contextualising principle" developed in his work on education. Here, this principle is seen to be carefully selecting and manipulating the English language to establish its own particular order of practices in ESL instruction within the school context. The operation of these social and cultural practices in English language instruction at the institutional level constitutes the overall context of formal ESL instruction in the school. Thus, it can be said that assessment, language skills acquisition, grammar competence and expressions of authority form the main rules of transmission in ESL school instruction. Together they operate to form the socio-cultural structure in ESL learning in the school, as shown in 5.19. Here, the socio-cultural structure is seen to be the systematic organization of the operation of the four elements. Moreover, this structure is not fixed or unitary or arbitrary, but is rather determined by the social and cultural conditions immediately surrounding it, conditions such as the changing trends in societal beliefs about ESL education.

Another observation yielded from Fig. 5.19 is that, because the structure is seen to arise from the perceptions of different groups within the school setting, it is a perceived structure, in the sense that it remains basically an implicit phenomenon and, therefore, may not be open to any form of analytical study by itself. However, it can be substantiated and therefore made explicit when it manifests itself in the actual L2 classroom, which in this case would be the patterns of talk that occur in it. In other words, the extent to which the socio-cultural structure is expressed and realized in the language classroom can only come about through a study of the relationship between the two. Before such an analysis can happen,

however, the significant features of talk in the language classroom will have to be identified and described. This is attended to in the next chapter.

### Summary

Analyses from the interview transcripts show that the socio-cultural structure of formal ESL instruction embodies four main elements – assessment, authority, structural competence and acquisition of language skills. Further analyses of each of these elements provide new insights about their particular characteristics in formal language learning. Structural competence, for example, is about grammar knowledge. In terms of skills acquisition, the focus is on the acquisition of academic skills with greater attention paid to written skills. This is partly because the main components within the main assessment are in the written mode. Language instruction is also about authority. Here, authority is given to the formal linguistic code of the school. Authority is also given to teachers because of their superior knowledge of the subject. These four elements are the social practices that constitute the main make-up the context of ESL instruction in the school. Together, they operate in an interrelated manner to form the perceived socio-cultural structure in the English language instruction in the school.



## Chapter 6

### The Features of Classroom Talk during the English Lesson

#### 6.2.0 Introduction

This chapter contains the findings and discussion of observations carried out in the upper secondary language classroom in the school. The observations stretch over a period of seven weeks. Analysis and results of findings revolve around Form 4CS, where students take a combination of commerce and arts subjects. These students are preparing to sit for the externally marked Brunei-Cambridge G.C.E. 'O' level exams (henceforth BGCE 'O' levels) at the end of their next and final year in school. The students are of average ability in English. There are altogether 43 students in the class, all of whom, except for one, come from non-English speaking homes. Over 60% are Malay students and the rest are made up of Chinese and Indians.

In order to fully address the purpose of this study, an analytical examination will focus on one observation of an English lesson carried out in Form 4CS. Particularly, an attempt is made to subject the oral discourse patterns found in the various stages of the lesson to a detailed and in-depth study. This is done by incorporating analyses of significant features into a narrative of the lesson in progress. Thus, the first section of this chapter set out to give an account of the lesson in stages from introduction to conclusion, incorporating simultaneous analyses of the structure, content and manner of classroom communication between the teacher and the students at each stage. Reviews, analyses and findings are based mainly on the transcript of an audio recording of the lesson (see Appendix 13). This is supported by the video recording carried out and field notes taken before, during and after the observation. Documents in the form of teacher notes, worksheets and students' written work (see Appendix 7 & 8) are also used wherever and whenever it is deemed appropriate. The tools of analysis employed here are based on the structural and functional IRE (Initiation-Response-

Evaluation) pattern analysis of Wells (1999), Ravelli's (1998) functional grammar analysis and the various content and interpretive methods of classroom interaction of Seedhouse (1996).

The second and final section of this chapter contains detailed discussion of each of the findings made in the first part of the chapter. This is followed by an attempt to consolidate the different parts of the discussion to address the research question under study. Various strands of the discussion are made more coherent and comprehensible wherever possible through visually created illustrations and diagrams.

### 6.2.1 The classroom observation

This is a grammar lesson that lasted for one period of 35 minutes. The topic is on "Agreement of subject with verb". It appears that this it is not a new topic for the students. From the transcript, it is discovered the students had been taught this particular grammar topic at the beginning of the year: "(53) T: I'm repeating this topic. In the beginning of the year, if you remember, I told you ...". Apparently, the teacher has felt it necessary to review this topic "to make students aware of the correct use of subject verb agreement. In particular when it comes to composition writing" (field notes prior to observation). The main teaching aids used in this lesson are the basic chalk and blackboard and two sets of teacher-constructed written exercises. The teacher does not use the textbook at any time during the lesson.

From an initial review of the lesson, it is found that it consists of three stages in sequential order, the introductory stage, the instruction stage and the concluding stage.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Instruction</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
- recall of grammar knowledge	- transmission of information	- written assignment - feedback

Here, these will be simply referred to as Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3. The introduction stage consists mainly of teacher questions aimed at helping students recall their knowledge of the topic. Then the lesson is carried Stage 2, where the transmission of information, grammar rules and principles occurs. Stage 3 is when students are given written work on the topic and then the teacher provides verbal feedback by going over the completed exercise with them. The remaining part of this section is devoted to carrying out analytical findings at each stage.

### 6.2.2 An analysis of the English lesson in three stages

#### Stage 1

The teacher introduces the lesson by writing five incomplete sentences on the blackboard shown below:

1. Jack and Jill \_\_\_\_\_ on the hill
2. The teacher with her students \_\_\_\_\_ in class
3. Either John or Jack \_\_\_\_\_ done this
4. None of the boys in the class \_\_\_\_\_ a culprit
5. The committee \_\_\_\_\_ agreed on the proposal

She then calls upon individual students to respond orally to each sentence by calling out the correct verbs to be put in to complete the sentence. A content and functional analysis is carried out to further examine the purpose of the exercise at this stage of the lesson. In Table 6.2.1 the items on the board are analysed in terms of *Structure*, *Mode*, *Content* and *Function*. *Structure* has been divided into “type” and “form”. Specifically, it looks into what type of exercise it is and the form it takes. “Type” here refers to how the topic has been organized, whether it has been arranged as a structured exercise, such as the fill-in-the-blank cloze passage exercise, or in the form of a task, such as an information-seeking or problem-solving activity. “Form” has to do with the layout and format of the exercise or task and the level of instruction, whether it is at word or sentence or text level. *Mode* refers to the channel of conduct projected by the exercise. Is it a drill, or

group task, for example? *Content* refers to the message contained in the overall exercise in terms of the meaning and relationship among the five sentences. *Function* refers to the purpose of the exercise. In other words, what aspects of language learning does the exercise seek to promote?

<i>Structure</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Function</i>
• prescriptive/expository	• written drill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discrete point items</li> <li>• random messages</li> </ul>	• recall students' knowledge

Table 6.2.1 An analysis of the exercise on the board

From the analysis carried out, the structure of the exercise appears to exhibit a prescriptive nature. It has a blank in each sentence prescribing that a certain answer is required to be inserted for the sentence to be grammatically correct. In sentence 2, for example, the student called upon is expected to respond with “are” in place of the blank to complete the sentence correctly. Similarly, for sentence 3, the addition of the verb “has” will produce a grammatically correct sentence. The fact that there can be either absolutely right or wrong answers suggests that the exercise lends itself to a more expository form of teaching. The exercise appears to be an efficient way to test students’ knowledge of the English word class of verbs, particularly forms of the verbs ‘to be’, at the sentence level.

The mode or the way the items are arranged in the exercise suggests it is a oral drill. Every sentence has a similar pattern to the next in terms of construction. Each is constructed using the basic subject-verb-object (henceforth SVO) order, of about the same length shown in Fig. 6.2.2.

	(S)	(V)	(O)	
1.	Jack and Jill	_____	on the hill	(7 words)
	(S)	(V)	(O)	
2.	The teacher with her students	_____	in class	(8 words)
	(S)	(V)	(O)	
3.	Either John or Jack	_____	done this	(7 words)

Fig 6.2.2 An analysis of the sentence structure in the exercise

A sample of three sentences from the exercise is analysed in terms of form and length. From Fig. 6.2.2, it is found that all three sentences have the basic SVO order of construction and include between seven and eight words when completed. The simple SVO order and relatively short length of these sentences appear to make explicit that a verb is needed to complete the sentence. Moreover, the identical sentence construction and short length appear to make the exercise easy for repetitive learning.

In the area of content, the exercise does not appear to project a common theme or context. What is evident is that there are five discrete items sending out random and quite unrelated messages. Thus, the message gained in sentence 1 about Jack and Jill, for example, does not appear to be related in a coherent way to sentence 2 about the teacher with her students in class. The five items have been further subjected to a functional analysis to establish the extent of their relationship within a common theme or contextual base. The results are presented in Fig. 6.2.3

1. Jack and Jill \_\_\_\_\_ on the hill. (NI)
2. The teacher with her students \_\_\_\_\_ in class. (NI)
3. Either John or Jack \_\_\_\_\_ done this. (NI)
4. None of the boys in the class \_\_\_\_\_ a culprit. (NI)

Key:





Contextual framework

(NI)

New Information

Fig. 6.2.3 The contextual relationship among the 5 items of the board exercise

From Fig. 6.2.3, the relationship among the five items of the board exercise is analysed in terms of contextual frames. Thus, a  which encloses all five items will show a high level of contextualisation. Alternatively, each item cocooned within its own little  suggests a weak level of contextualisation. “New information” (NI) refers to the extent to which the message offered in one item is expanded by or linked to the next item in the exercise.

In Fig. 6.2.3, each item exists neatly within its own contextual framework. There is no evidence of a larger common context. Sentence 1 appears not to be related to sentence 2 contextually, which in turn is not linked to sentence 3 in any coherent way, and so forth. In short, the items seem to be randomly put together in a context-free environment. The findings also show that there is low cohesion of information among all five sentences, in the sense that each sentence is found to contain new, brief and different information. For example, it is difficult to see the link between the information in sentence 4 about none of the boys being a culprit in class and that of the committee agreeing on the proposal in sentence 5.

Generally, the findings here suggest that, while each item makes sense and provides information within itself at sentence level, the amount of disconnected and unrelated information offered, added to the absence of a context, however, makes the exercise less coherent at the text level.

The function of the board exercise appears to be testing students' ability to recall knowledge of a grammar topic that has previously been covered. From the foregoing analyses, it is also quite clear that the exercise is constructed with the intention of promoting structural competence rather than interactive communication in the classroom. Thus while, for example, sentence 2 reads as: "the teacher with her students \_\_\_\_\_ in class". The insertion of "are" or "were" may help the teacher to gauge students' knowledge of the use of subject-verb agreement in English grammar, it does not appear to do much in generating "talk" that goes beyond the question-answer exchange.

Using the written exercise on the board as a base, the teacher proceeds to carry out an oral session with the students. There is no evidence of explanations or instructions from the teacher prior to the oral session. Students are assumed to understand what is required. From the observations made, it is apparent that students have been made familiar with the routine of the conduct of the English lesson, because they all appear to know what is expected of them at this stage without instruction. Individual students are nominated by the teacher to provide oral answers to fill in the blank in each sentence. There are altogether five teacher-student exchange sequences at this stage of the lesson. Moreover, a review shows that all five exchange sequences exhibit a similar three-part interaction pattern. An analysis, based on Wells' (1999) structural-functional analysis of classroom talk, is carried out on one such sequence to provide a structural and functional perspective to the classroom "talk". The purpose of such an analysis is to find out the potential for such exchanges to engage students in actively using the language they are learning. The findings are presented in Fig. 6.2.4.

Sequence 5	Exchange	Move	Prospect	Function
36 T : <i>what can you put in the blank?</i>	Nuc.	I	D	Req. ans.
37 S9 : <i>has</i>	Emb.	R	G	Ans.
38 T : ((writes the answer on the board))	Emb.	F	A	Ack.
<i>Ian, is this correct?</i>	Emb.	I	D	Req. check
39 S10 : <i>no</i>	Emb.	R	G	Ans. evaluate
40 T : <i>no. alright</i>	Emb.	F	A	Ack.

Key:	T	:	teacher	D	:	demand
	S	:	student	G	:	give
	Nuc.	:	nuclear	A	:	acknowledgement
	Emb.	:	embedded	Req.	:	request
	I	:	initiation	Ans.	:	answer
	R	:	response	Ack.	:	acknowledge
	F	:	feedback	<i>italics</i>	:	sentence under analysis

Fig. 6.2.4 A structural-functional analysis of classroom talk

Fig 6.2.4 shows the analysis of exchange sequence 5 which represents the structure of all the other teacher-student exchange sequences. Each turn in the sequence is analysed according to four strategic categories. In order to make sense of the results and findings, it may be appropriate to offer a brief elaboration of the categories. The first category is the type of Exchange. In particular, two types of exchanges are referred to here. One is the “Nuclear” (Nuc) exchange. This is basically an independent utterance which adds new content into the interaction sequence. The other type is the “Embedded” (Emb) exchange, which is bound to the nuclear exchange in some way. The next category is the Move category. More specifically, there are three possible moves indicated – the (I) or Initiation, (R) for Response and (F) for Feedback. Thus, any turn which starts the conversation is an (I), which then elicits a response (R) turn. This in turn is often followed by some



form of feedback (F) turn. The third category is the Prospect category. This essentially evaluates the prospectiveness of a turn in generating talk. The most prospective would be a ‘demand’ (D) because it requires a ‘give’ (G) in response. A (G) is considered less prospective because although it expects a response, it does not require one. The least prospective term is an “acknowledgement” (A), which almost always follows a (G) but by itself expects no further response. The fourth and final category is the Function category. Here, the turn is analysed in terms of the role it plays, that is whether it is a request, answer or evaluation and so forth.

Having made the categories explicit, in Fig. 6.2.4, the conversation in exchange sequence 5 consists of a single nuclear exchange in the first turn 36, where the teacher asks S9 what should be put in the blank in the sentence just read. All the subsequent turns are embedded exchanges tied in various ways to the nuclear exchange. Turn 37 is S9’s response to the question asked. This is followed by turn 38, which consists of the teacher’s acknowledgment to the response. The question directed at S10 in turn 38 does not offer any new message but merely asks for his feedback on S9’s answer. Moreover, the embedded exchanges appear to be more about eliciting answers and providing feedback pertaining to a single nuclear exchange. There is little evidence of expansion or development of the nuclear exchange.

In terms of moves, it is possible to divide the exchange sequence into two parts (between turns 36 & 38 and 38 & 40), each exhibiting a structure of three main operating moves – the I-R-F:

				<u>Move</u>
36	T	:	what can you put in the blank?	I
37	S9	:	has	R
38	T	:	((writes the answer on the board))	F
			I, is this correct?	I
39	S10	:	no	R
40	T	:	no. alright	F

Moreover, the moves proceed in a consistent sequence. The initiation (I) is always the first move. This is repeatedly followed by a nominated response (R), which in turn elicits some form of feedback (F). It is possible to say that the teacher-student interaction adheres to a more or less formulaic structure.

Another observation made here is that all the initiation moves are made by the teacher. Thus in turn 36, the teacher initiates the conversation by asking S9 for the answer to the sentence just read. In turn 38, she starts the interaction with S10 by asking for his evaluation of S9's answer. The teacher also makes all the feedback moves. In turn 38, she provides feedback in the written form by writing S9's response in the blank provided on the board while in turn 40, she reaffirms S10's response by repeating it. However, it is noted that the feedback is non-evaluative but is more like an acknowledgement. On the other hand, the (R) or response moves are made by the students. In this case, all the responses are nominated responses in the sense that the students are called upon by the teacher to respond. Students do not make any initiating or voluntary feedback moves throughout the exchange sequence.

What the findings suggest are that (i) there appears to be an efficient structure of classroom interaction which operates in a consistent and systematic manner, (ii) that teachers and students are assigned, as though by default, to particular moves within this pattern of discourse and (iii) the teacher is seen to assume a more dominant and therefore authoritative role during interaction.

When it comes to the Prospect category, it is possible to divide the exchange sequence into two parts similar to that of the preceding Move category. In the first part (between turns 36 and 38) the teacher engages a student (S9) into giving an answer. The second part (between turns 38 and 40) is when the teacher attempts to get another student (S10) to evaluate S9's answer. The two parts show a symmetrical structure of prospectiveness shown in the example below:

Example

36	T	what can you put in the blank?	] D-G-A
37	S9	has	
38	T	((writes the answer on the board))	
		I, is this correct?	] D-G-A
39	S10	no	
40	T	no. alright	

Both parts display a 'demand' by the teacher (turns 36 & 38) that requires a "give" from the students (turns 37 & 39). In both instances, the "give" is followed by a "acknowledgement" from the teacher (turns 38 & 40). Assuming that there is a descending order of prospectiveness  $D > G > A$ , it is possible to suggest that the interaction between the teacher and students is more for the intention of gauging students' knowledge of the topic than for communicative language use. This is apparent from the questions asked in turns 36 and 38, which are designed to elicit responses such as those found in turns 37 and 39. Thus, in turns 39 and 40, it is quite obvious that, for the teacher, "no" is a sufficient answer because she does not appear to provide a "give" to generate talk, such as by asking S10 for reasons for saying "no". Incidentally, in both the Move and Prospect categories, student responses are nominated responses in that the teacher has called upon individual students by their names to respond to her questions. Students do not volunteer an answer unless called upon to do so.

The Function category shows the exchange sequence to be mainly requests for answers or evaluation and acknowledgement. Furthermore, all requests are being made by the teacher. In the first part, the teacher asks S9 for the answer to the sentence on the board and then asks S10 to check the answer of S9. The answering responses in turns 37 and 39 are provided by students S9 and S10. The teacher also controls all the acknowledgement turns, which in both parts occur directly after the students' responses. Thus, it can be suggested that the I-R-F pattern of interaction has been effectively employed by the teacher to fulfill her teaching purposes, that is to assess students' knowledge. However, from the students' perspective, language learning becomes just another subject to be learnt. It is quite

clear that this pattern of interaction limits the opportunities for students to actively produce language in other more communicative ways.

## Stage 2

The oral session is followed by the body of the lesson. Observations show this to be the stage where formal instruction on the topic is being carried out. There appear to be two sections within this stage. The first section is a brief revision on the definition of verbs and identification of forms of the verbs (to be). The teacher goes over each sentence on the board with the given answers, simultaneously pointing out the errors. This is followed by the teacher's detailed instruction concerning the rules, principles and exceptions to rules of subject-verb agreement. Two distinct observations are noted here – the use of metatalk, that is phrases, terms and expressions used exclusively to talk about the grammar, and the manner in which instruction is being conveyed. A frequency count of the use of metatalk is carried out to find out the level of such talk in the lesson. The findings are presented in Table 6.2.5.

No. of turns ( N=32)		Frequency of metalinguistic use (N=71)
Teacher	16	. 71
Students	16	0

*Table 6.2.5 Frequency of metatalk in classroom instruction*

Assuming the body of the lesson to be between turns 40 and 71, there is a total of 32 turns in teacher-student exchanges. A turn refers to each particular slot in the conversation. Half of the total number of turns are taken by the teacher, while the remaining turns belong to students. In these 32 turns, there are 71 instances of metatalk, that of which occur in the turns taken by the teacher. This suggests an average of between four and five instances of metalinguistic expressions used by the teacher in each turn. Based on this finding, it is quite clear that there is a high frequency of metalinguistic use by the teacher in formal instruction compared to none used by the students.

A further analysis is carried out to find out the types and frequency of metalinguistic expressions. The results are shown in Table 6.2.6.

From Table 6.2.6, there are 71 direct metalinguistic expressions used. “Direct” here means use of the technical name given to units of grammar. The most frequent expressions are “subject” and “verb”. There are 28 instances of occurrence for each. The teacher uses “subject” in an abstract and grammar specific sense: (62) “here, now, the subject is “Jack and Jill”; (66) the main subject here is “the teacher”, not “the students”. Verbs are defined by the teacher by the phrase (46) “they show action”, although she does not explain how ‘are, have, is, has ...’ (42) represent “action”. She also mentions “singular verbs” (62) and “plural verbs” (70). There are ten instances of the use of “noun” including “collective noun” (70) and “proper nouns” (64). The other five instances of metalinguistic expressions are “agreement of verb with subject” (three times), “tense” (once) and “conjunction” (once).

Metalinguistic Expression	Frequency of Occurrence
	N = 71
“subject”	28
“verb”	28
“noun”	10
“agreement verb with subject”	3
“tense”	1
“conjunction”	1

*Table 6.2.6 The type/s of metalinguistic expressions and their frequency of occurrence during formal instruction*

Furthermore, apart from reviewing what verbs are in turn 46, there is no evidence of attempts made by the teacher to explain or elaborate on the other technical grammar expressions. This suggests that students are expected to have prior good knowledge of grammar terms. From the transcript, a list is made of the 16 student responses. This is displayed in Table 6.2.7.

Between turns 40 and 71, there are altogether 16 student responses. These can be described under four categorical types. The first type is “Monosyllabic”, where there are one-word response such as “is”, “yes/no”. Under the second category is the “Silent” type, where there is no response to the teacher’s questions at all. The third type is the “Unintelligible” response. Here, it may be that the students are mumbling or speaking too softly for the observer to record what is being said. In the last category, the “Phrasal” response is recorded. This occurs where students respond in short phrases or incomplete sentences.

Type of student response	Frequency of occurrence (N=16)
Monosyllabic	6
Silent	4
Unintelligible	4
Phrasal	2

*Table 6.2.7 Types of student response and their frequency of occurrence*

As can be seen from Table 6.7, the most frequent type of response is the monosyllabic response shown in the following examples:

Example 1

46 T they (verbs) show action, isn't it? yes or no?  
 47 SS *yes*

Example 2

56 T what is the subject in the third sentence?

57 S15 *either*

Example 3

62 T the singular verb for 'are' would be?

63 SS *is*

The monosyllabic responses are "yes", "either" and "is". It also appears that the student responses are constrained by the question being asked. For the question in turn 46, for example, the only possible response is "yes" or "no". The question in turn 56 is a "wh" question prompting a one-word answer, while an elicitation cue used by the teacher in turn 62 invites the monosyllabic "is" response.

The next most frequent type of response is the silent and unintelligible type. It is difficult to account for unintelligible responses, as their occurrence may be due to many different reasons, one of which is the limitation of the data collection method used. The silent response, however, is distinctively noticeable:

Example 1

40 T what are the blanks that have been filled with? what  
are they? 2.0

41 SS *((silence))*

Example 2

44 T what are verbs? S?

45 S11 *((silence))*

Example 3

70 T anyone has any doubt? (about the explanation just  
given)

71 SS *((silence))*

From the examples, students choose to remain silent, although it may have to do with the ambiguity of questions, such as that asked in utterance 40. What is apparent, though, is that whenever a lengthy response is required, there is silence. In turn 44 for example, when asked to explain what verbs are, S11 remains silent. In turn 70, when asked if there are any problems, none of the students say anything, although they do exhibit some problems later on in the lesson. It has to be said that for these second language learners, coming up with a generally lengthy and complex answer in the target language can be a daunting experience. First they have to listen to the question, organise the information mentally in a language they are not fluent in, and then actively produce a coherent response. For this reason, it is probably easier to take the alternative choice and remain silent.

The least frequent type of response is the short phrasal response. This occurs in two instances, shown in the examples below:

Example 1

54 T N, in the second sentence, what is the subject?  
55 S14 *the teacher*

Example 2

58 T V, in the fourth sentence, what is the subject?  
59 S16 *none of the boys*

From the above examples, it is noted that in turns 55 and 59, the students either literally read out words from the sentence or are merely repeating part of the sentences in the answers. Neither of the responses in the above two examples appear to be in the students' own words or expressions. As with the case of the monosyllabic responses, it appears that these short responses, often reporting ad verbatim from exercises, are prompted by the questions being asked. Moreover, it does not require original expression or formulation of personal response despite being personally addressed.



From the findings, it is not clear whether students actually understand the instruction given by the teacher. However, from the types of responses found, the observation made is that students' oral output during the lesson is minimal. This contrasts quite dramatically with the teacher's output. From the data presented, there is more talk from the teacher during this part of the lesson. In a way, the teacher, more than the students, is seen to have the opportunity to use the target language actively. Examples of this can be found in the section of the lesson between turns 62 and 71 (see Appendix 13), which shows six lengthy turns of teacher instruction with an average of fifteen uninterrupted lines per turn. This indicates a large amount of teacher instruction. A review of the transcript data showed significant similarities in all six turns. Using the data from turn 66, an analysis is carried out to determine the characteristics of teacher instruction. This is presented in Table 6.2.8.

Teacher instruction	Type		Structure		Conception		Function		Prospect	
	Pres	Des	Exp	Imp	Abs	Con	Corr	promp	mono	dia
Characteristics	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-

Key: Pres: prescriptive                      Abs : abstract                      mono : monologic  
Des : descriptive                              Con : concrete                      dia : dialogic  
Exp : explicit                                    Corr : corrective                      + : present  
Imp : implicit                                    promp : prompt                      - : absent

*Table 6.2.8 An analysis of the characteristics of teacher classroom instruction in the classroom*

From a review of turn 66, which reflects all the other five turns, it is possible to describe the characteristics of teacher instruction under five main categories. Each category is then further divided using dichotomous distinctions. The first category is "Type", which is expressed in terms of the prescriptive/descriptive distinction. In other words, is the teacher actually telling the students how subject-verb agreement should be used or is she describing the ways it can be used. The next category is "Structure", the way the instruction has been organised. In particular, it looks at whether the topic is addressed directly and openly (explicit) or whether it is implied or suggested through another medium (implicit), such as group

activity or activity tasks set, for example. The “Conception” category refers to how the instruction is being conceived. Two contrasting levels of conception are considered - the abstract level and the concrete level. Instruction at the abstract level would be where the teacher talks about the grammar without elaboration or examples and often without a contextual base. On the other hand, instruction at the concrete level means that efforts are made by the teacher to enable students to see or experience how subject-verb agreement for example, is being used either through a context or through activities. The fourth category is the “Function” category. Basically, this refers to the purpose of the instruction, that is whether the intention is merely to correct the errors students have made (corrective) or to encourage students to contribute to the correction of an error by asking questions or inviting suggestions (prompt). The final category “Prospect” refers to the potential of the instruction for generating or expanding talk in the classroom. Here, the instruction is analysed as monologic or dialogic, monologic meaning a lengthy, one-sided lecture by the teacher, thus deterring student participation or dialogic, where there is on-going discussion between the teacher and students.

From Table 6.2.8, the teacher’s instruction is seen to be of the prescriptive type:

Examples taken from turn 66

understand carefully

...subject is very important for you to understand. otherwise you will  
always go wrong here

the verb must agree with the subject

then you have to go along by the sense (of the sentence)

understand another rule

don't think that it's (the topic) something very technical

The above are just some examples of data taken from turn 66 that show the prescriptiveness of the teacher's instruction. This is evident in the frequent use of the second pronoun 'you' and modals 'will/must/have to' underlined in the examples shown above. This shows quite clearly that the teacher is telling the students how subject-verb agreement should be used rather than engaging them in discussion about how it can be used. Moreover, the examples suggest that the teacher is in an authoritative position, at least where subject knowledge is concerned.

The structure of the instruction is explicit in the sense that specific grammar terms pertaining to the topic are presented directly:

but the main subject in the sentence is "the teacher". it is not "the students".

when you have alternatives, use 'either' and 'or', the verb is always singular.

Here, terms like "subject" and "verb" are used directly by the teacher exactly as they would be found in any grammar reference textbook on subject-verb agreement. The teacher also makes explicit the rules of subject-verb agreement such as by explaining that where there is 'either'/'or' between two subjects, the verb should be singular.

It is also observed that instruction is conveyed at an abstract level. This is evident in the frequent use of technical expressions such as "noun", "verb", "subject" and so forth. It is noted that altogether there are twenty-two instances of technical expressions being used in turn 66 alone. Furthermore, these expressions are embedded in the presentation of rules and principles of the grammar topic at a level not often encountered in everyday English. The example below is extracted from the teacher's instruction:

Example

again understand another rule. when you have alternatives, use ‘either’ and ‘or’, the verb is always singular ... then the exception to this rule will be the verb which is ... the number of the noun that is closest to the verb has to be taken into consideration (turn 66).

Here, the teacher is instructing the students on the rules, principles and exceptions to rules of English subject-verb agreement. Apart from being highly abstracted and formal, the instruction also appears to be given in an impersonal and authoritative manner. Note the use of “you” by the teacher as in “when you have alternatives, use ‘either’ and ‘or’...” to create a distance between herself and the students. Instructions like “again, understand another rule” and “when you have alternatives ... the verb is always singular” show the authority of the teacher over subject knowledge.

Under the Function category of classroom instruction, it appears that the role of teacher instruction is to provide direct and immediate correction to errors made by the students. Fig 6.2.9 shows an interpretive analysis of the way in which correction of errors is being carried out during instruction.

64	T	comes to the second sentence.		sentence 2
		now ... rule for agreement of verb	}	rule
		with subject is when one noun ‘teacher’		
		is (present),		
		‘are’ is definitely wrong here ...	}	error
		so what will you put here?	}	requesting correction
65	SS	is	}	correction
66	T	is. alright.	}	evaluation
		the verb that you supply here has to agree	}	restating rule
		with the subject, ‘the teacher’ ...		

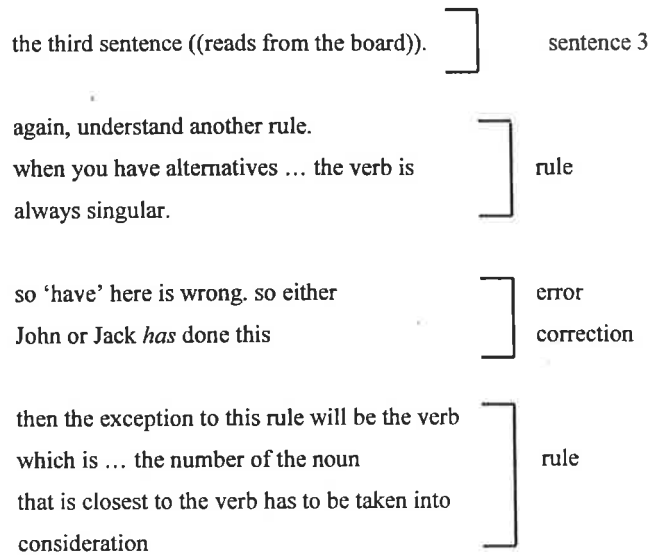


Fig. 6.2.9 An interpretative analysis of error correction during teacher instruction

From the data in Fig 6.2.9 taken from classroom interaction between turns 64 and 66, it is possible to suggest that the intention of instruction at this point is to correct error in the usage of subject-verb agreement in the English language. It also suggests a systematic approach by the teacher when it comes to correction: r-r-c-r (read – rule- correct – rule). The teacher first reads each sentence, gives the appropriate rule governing the subject-verb agreement in it, points out the error and then corrects it before concluding with a restatement of the rule. It is also observed that, apart from turn 65 where the students are asked to correct an error, in all other instances, explanations and corrections are carried out exclusively by the teacher. The students' participation is not required when it comes to explaining or correcting errors.

Furthermore, the teacher appears to be very concerned with correction of errors. One reason may be the exams. Evidence of this is found in references made by the teacher throughout the instruction pertaining to student exam performance, shown in the examples below:

Example1

62 T this is because you repeat this mistake in your

composition, your written work...when you write your essay, this has to agree with the subject.

Example 2

66        T        remember why I'm doing it to detail. because your composition you make one mistake like this and ½ mark is deducted. I'm not doing this for the sake of doing it. alright?

The underlined words, expressions and statements made by the teacher during instruction, such as “composition”, “essay”, “½ a mark is deducted” all show quite clearly that the purpose behind all the correction and rule explanations is to help students do well in the written composition in Paper 2 of the G.C.E. “O” Level exams next year.

Under the category of Prospect, an analysis on the length of utterances in each turn is carried out to ascertain the level of interaction between the teacher and students during the teacher instruction. The results are displayed in Table 6.2.10.

In Table 6.2.10, the interaction is analysed according to turn, participant and length of utterance. Here, each turn is numbered from 62 to 71 as recorded in the transcript data. The participant is the person holding the floor, so to speak, for that particular turn. In this case, there are two participant groups – the teacher and the students. The length of utterance refers to the stretch of speech between two stops or question marks. Thus, each such stretch of speech equals 1 unit in terms of frequency count. In mathematical terms, 1 unit = 1 complete sentence, 1 phrase or even 1 word. The unit of measurement in terms of utterance length is 1 unit is to one stretch of speech.

Turn Number	Participant	Length of utterance (N=119)
62	Teacher	19
63	student	1
64	teacher	15
65	students	1
66	teacher	44
67	students	1
68	teacher	19
69	students	0
70	teacher	19
71	students	0

*Table 6.2.10 An analysis of the length of utterances in teacher-student turns during stage 2 of the lesson*

From the results in Table 6.2.10, there is an equal number of alternate turns between the teacher and students. Between turns 62 and 71, each participant takes a total of 5 turns. However, there is a big difference in the length of utterance between them. The findings show that there are longer utterances in every instance of teacher turn compared to student turn. Moreover, the teacher's utterances are more complex in structure compared to the utterances of the students. There are, for example, more instances of complete sentence construction. This can be illustrated by turn 64:

Sentence 1      two nouns, Jack and Jill, proper nouns are connected together with the conjunction "and".

Sentence 2      it will always take the verb "are".

Sentence 3      this is the first basic rule of agreement verb with subject.

Here the teacher's turn consists of three complete sentences, which are quite well constructed, reasonably complex and lengthy utterances. Compare this to the student turns shown in the examples below:

Examples:

63      L      is

65      SS      is

67      SS      yes

69      SS      ((silence))

71      SS      ((silence))

These are found to contrast quite dramatically with those of the teacher. The students have contributed very little to the interaction. Out of the five turns, three are monosyllabic utterances "is", "is" and "yes" while two are "silent" turns. In turns 69 and 71, none of the students offers any response at all to the teacher's questions.

A further review of the data finds that the teacher has made an average of 23 utterances per turn, and this without any interruption from the students. In fact, the data show the teacher often expounding in monologic fashion. Using the example of turn 70, an analysis is carried out to determine the "prospectiveness" of teacher instructional talk. The analysis is presented in Fig. 6.2.11.

Here, the teacher is explaining the usage of subject-verb agreement when the subject is a collective noun, which in this case is "committee". From an analytical interpretation of this turn, it appears that the instruction exhibits the following sequential features: explanation-definition-answer-question-answer-evaluation-explanation-question-elaboration-question. Thus, the teacher first explains the rules for the correct grammatical use of the verb following the various subjects in a sentence (1-3). She then goes on to define collective nouns



(4) before providing the answer to the sentence on the board (5). After this, she asks for the name of the student who had evaluated the answer given (6). Not waiting for an answer, she goes on to reaffirm the answer given on the board (8). This is followed by further explanation about exceptions to the rule with regards to collective nouns as subjects in a sentence (9-13). She ends the explanation by checking if students understand what she is saying (14). Again, she does not wait for a response but immediately goes on to further elaborate the point she has been making (15). She ends the turn by inviting students to ask questions if they have doubts about the instruction (16).

It is quite clear from the length of the turn that the teacher is concerned with conveying as much information as she can with as little interruption as possible. Apart from utterance 16, all the other questions asked (6, 14) appear to be pseudo type questions that do not really require a response. Question 6 is more a remark which the teacher answers herself in utterance 7. Students are not really required to respond to question 14 because she promptly goes on to elaborate the rules of the grammar point without waiting for a reply. This example, as do all the other five turns, illustrates a monologic transmission of facts, rules and grammar knowledge from the teacher.

70	T	(1) another major rule you have to follow in agreement verb with subject	
		(2) you have collective nouns ... the usage of the verb varies along with the sense of the sentence.	[explanation]
		(3) 5, 6, 10 persons, it varies.	
		(4) more than 3 will make a committee.	[definition]
		(5) so 'committee <i>has</i> agreed on the proposal'.	[answer]
		(6) now, who had said the sentence was wrong?	[question]
		(7) I don't remember ... yah.	[answer]
		(8) This is correct ((marks the sentence on the board)).	[evaluate]
		(9) o.k. now here, you have an exception to the rule.	[explanation]
		(10) here, you're taking the committee as a whole, as a group.	
		(11) but when the sentence makes a discrimination ... the ... now here, 'the	

- committee has agreed on the proposal’.
- (12) were I to put in another way, all various factors ((changes the sentence on the board))
- (13) ‘the members of the committee *were* upset’, then I will use a plural verb.
- (14) alright? [question]
- (15) a collective noun, a committee, a bouquet of flowers, always will take a singular verb. [elaboration]
- (16) anyone has any doubt? [question]

*Fig. 6.2.11 An analysis of the ‘prospectiveness’ of teacher oral instruction during the lesson*

### Stage 3

After the instruction stage comes the concluding part of the lesson. Here, students are told to open their grammar exercise books. The teacher dictates a written exercise for the students to take down and work at. Samples of the exercise are shown below:

#### Samples of written exercise

Supply a verb in agreement with the subject:

1. none of us \_\_\_\_\_ seen him
2. each person \_\_\_\_\_ a hat
6. either man \_\_\_\_\_ come
7. the committee \_\_\_\_\_ to meet tomorrow

As can be seen from the extract given, the items are similar to the sentences written on the board at the beginning of the lesson. Students are instructed to “supply a verb in agreement with the subject” in the blank of each sentence. There are altogether ten such sentences dictated. Field notes and the video recording taken during the observation show students working individually without conferring with one another. It is not clear whether they are allowed to confer at

all, although it appears that students are encouraged to work individually. There is absolute silence at this point of the lesson.

About ten minutes later, the teacher goes over the exercise orally through a question-answer session similar to the kind of interaction at the beginning of the lesson. Table 6.2.12 shows an analysis of one teacher-student exchange sequence in the final stages of the lesson. The tool of analysis is identical to that employed in stage 1.

There are three similar episodes of teacher-student interaction before the bell that signals the end of the lesson. Using episode 3, the analysis in Table 6.2.12 shows a similar type of interaction to the one at the beginning of the lesson. Here, the teacher is trying to get the student to give the correct answer to the third sentence of the exercise. It is observed that the entire conversational episode revolves around a single nuclear exchange in turn 81. All the subsequent turns are embedded exchanges that appear to be bound to the nuclear exchange in the form of repair work. Between turns 83 and 87, the teacher is seen trying to prompt the student into giving the correct answer. This is done through repair strategies such as by appealing to the rules governing the use of subject-verb agreement and by repeating parts of the sentence.

Episode 3	Exchange	Move	Prospect	Function
81 T : Zachary, the 3 <sup>rd</sup> one ((sentence))	Nuclear	Initiation	Demand	Req. ans.
82 S20 : each person <i>have</i> a hat	Embedded	Response	Give	Ans.
83 T : each person?	Embedded	Initiation	Demand	Req. check
84 S20 : have	Embedded	Response	Give	Confirm
85 T : each? What does the rule say 'each' takes?	Embedded	Initiation	Demand	Req. check
86 S20 : has	Embedded	Response	Give	Correction
87 T : has	Embedded	Feedback	Ack.	Ack.

Key:	T	:	teacher
	S	:	student
	Req.	:	request
	Ack.	:	acknowledge
	Ans.	:	answer

*Table 6.2.12 A structural-functional analysis of a teacher-student exchange sequence*

The move structure appears to be in the form of I-R-I-R-I-R-F. It takes three initiations from the teacher and three responses from the student to finally arrive at an answer acceptable to the teacher, which she acknowledges in turn 87. Similar to what is found at the beginning of the lesson, the exchange sequence follows a systematic and alternate teacher-student-teacher order of sequence. Translated into participant slots, the move structure can be expressed as : teacher-student-teacher-student-teacher-student-teacher. It is noted that the teacher starts the conversation and also ends the conversation. Thus, it is apparent that the teacher is in control throughout the three stages of the episode.

In terms of prospectiveness, there appears to be a clear-cut structure of D-G-D-G-D-G-A. The teacher and students make alternate “demand” and “give” moves with the teacher ending the potential for expansion of talk with an acknowledgement in turn 87. This structure shows quite an efficient conversation being carried out with very little room for deviation of topic.

The function of the episode suggests that for the teacher, the intention of the conversation is to gauge student understanding of the topic. Thus the request for answers by nominating individual students to respond to the each item in the exercise. For the student, the main purpose of the interaction is to arrive at the “correct” answer directed by the teacher’s questions.

The lesson ends abruptly because the bell has rung for the next lesson to begin. The observation also ends at this point.

### 6.2.3 Discussion of the findings

From the analyses carried out, it is possible to conceptualise classroom oral discourse as having three main characteristics as shown in Fig. 6.2.13.

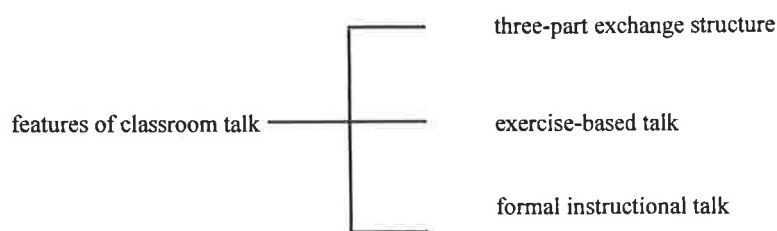


Fig 6.2.13 Characteristics of classroom oral discourse

Fig 6.2.13 shows the three main features underlying classroom talk. First, it consists of a three-part exchange structure based on the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern of teacher-student interaction. The second feature is the persistent type of formal instructional talk employed almost exclusively by the teacher in the transmission and conveyance of facts and information. The third feature is talk that is exercise-based. What this means is that, most of the time, the talk is based on two sets of written exercises with a heavy emphasis on grammar at its most abstract level. There is no instance of talk deviating from the “texts” (in the form of the grammar exercises).

The IRF exchange structure is found to be the unmarked pattern of interaction between the teacher and her students, thus confirming similar observations found in studies documented elsewhere (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979, Mercer, 2001). The IRF pattern is found to occur by default in every instance of teacher-student encounter. It is also observed that the I-R-F pattern of interaction is confined to the classroom. It is not evident in teacher-student talk in more casual encounters, such as after class, along the corridors of the school or even in the teacher’s room. This supports Mercer’s (2001) claim of a “classroom English” (Mercer, 2001 p.249) where English use is governed by certain unwritten rules known to the teachers and students. Certainly, the I-R-F exchange structure appears to be following certain implicit “ground rules” (Christie, 1990; Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999) that both the teacher and students appear to be well aware of. The general observation made is that I-R-F is a well-established practice in the classroom. It is also apparent that students are socialized into

accepting that this is the way they should interact with their teachers in the classroom, thus supporting similar findings in language classrooms elsewhere (Tanner, 1992; Holliday, 1994).

This socialization process is seen to be particularly important if there is to be a harmonious working relationship in the classroom. During the observations in this study, it is noted that everyone in class becomes uncomfortable when students try to deviate from the routine ways of classroom communication. However, such occasions are very rare and far in between. In one instance, when students interrupt or speak out of turn, the teacher immediately puts a stop to it. It is unclear why student interruption is being discouraged. Perhaps, it is seen to undermine the authority of the teacher as pointed out in O'Neill (1994) and Harmer (1995), or perhaps the class is just too large for teachers to cope with everyone talking at the same time, an argument put forward by Shamin (1994).

Moreover, this three-part pattern is seen to be the unmarked pattern of interaction and is consistently employed by the teacher throughout the lesson in gauging what students know and understand about the topic. This observation supports claims made in recent classroom studies (Seedhouse, 1996; Taylor, 1995; Wells, 1999) that, contrary to traditional studies that criticize the IRF as being non-interactive and restrictive, when assessed against the wider institutional and teaching goals, the IRF does make good sense in language teaching. It is not clear whether it is equally effective for overall language development because, despite its repetitive occurrence, students still exhibit some difficulty in the written exercise near the end of the lesson. Moreover, and this is observed during the lesson, while this pattern of interaction may help the teacher in assessing students' knowledge of the topic, it may not be of much value in promoting language use. One is reminded of Dougherty's (1998) argument that the classroom is the worst place to promote language use. Certainly, IRF is found to restrict the participants to certain roles in communication. The teacher, for example, is seen to have exclusive control over the initiation (I) and feedback (F) moves, while students are restricted to the response (R) move. The main consideration here is the intention behind such interaction in the classroom. It is quite clear that, in this lesson, the teacher appears to be more concerned with getting students to master a grammar point in

the English language than in promoting talk and the students seem to be aware of this. They know that the language they learn in the classroom is for the purpose of gaining knowledge about the language rather using the language. Moreover, this awareness may be an important one, as it means that students do have an idea of formal language instruction in the school context, a realization that may be for them a sensible and therefore acceptable language learning experience.

A further analysis provides a broader functional perspective to the I-R-F interaction pattern. Table 6.2.14 provides an illustrative summary of the findings.

	Content	Interactiveness	Role
IRF	Singular	D-G-A	Req. answer, answer, evaluation, acknowledgment

*Table 6.2.14 The structural and functional perspectives of the IRF pattern of classroom interaction*

From the functional perspective, IRF can be discussed in terms of content, interactiveness and role. “Content” here refers to the number of new messages or amount of information projected. “Interactiveness” is the potential of the exchange in generating ‘talk’ and finally the ‘role’ looks into the functions performed by IRF. Essentially, the ‘role’ of IRF is the projection of the intention of the parties in the interaction as perceived through the patterns of interactive behaviour exhibited.

From Fig. 6.2.14, the IRF structure is seen to contain a singular content in the sense of Wells (1999) that the exchange is centred on one message throughout. Moreover, the only new information offered is in the initiation (I) turn supplied by the teacher to start off the conversation. Subsequent turns do not attempt to expand or develop the new message initiated. Content in the subsequent turns reflects the singular content in the form of direct answers to the teacher’s questions and acknowledgements by the teacher of student responses. It appears that there are invisible parameters built around IRF, based on the teaching goals set up by the teacher for the particular lesson. This is evident in the way students are nominated to speak up every time a response is required. There is no instance of voluntary student response throughout the lesson. This reduces the possibility

of talk deviating from the topic and reminiscent of the claim Van Lier (2001) makes that “every IRF exchange is a step in an overall plan designed by the teacher” (p.95). The teacher knows the purpose of the IRF exercise, but it is less clear if there is mutual understanding of purpose.

In terms of its potential in generating talk, the IRF structure shows a consistent demand-give-acknowledge (DGA) sequence. Measured against Wells’ (1999) argument that the demand (D) move is the most prospective in terms of generating and expanding conversations and the acknowledgement (A) the least prospective, it is clear that the persistent DGA sequences in the findings makes for efficient, though somewhat less interesting, teacher-student conversations in the classroom. This three-part interaction pattern also does not seem to provide opportunities for students to actively use the language in the classroom, thus supporting Halliday’s (1993) claim that, in terms of communicativeness, the IRF or DGA framework has little to offer in language learning. This framework also limits opportunities for negotiation of meaning to take place in the classroom.

An examination of the role IRF plays shows quite clearly the intentions of the teacher and the students. The turns taken by the teacher are largely requests, in the form of specific questions designed to elicit short, succinct answers. This is followed by direct responses from the students in the form of recall of the grammar knowledge. The concluding turn is almost always an acknowledgement or evaluation statement made by the teacher in response to the students’ answers. The students’ intention is to respond or guess the correct answer, “correct” meaning the answer expected and approved by the teacher. Thus, the three-part exchange can be analysed as question–answer-evaluate (QAE) between the teacher as instructor and students as learners. By putting it in this way, it becomes obvious that the intention of IRF is not to promote language learning in the Vygotskian sense (Maybin, Mercer and Stierer, 1992; Wells, 1999) but to transmit knowledge about the language between two unequal conversation partners. From the studies carried out by Bernstein (2000), Christie (1998) and Kramsch (1998), it can also be said that IRF also reflects the transactional manner of transmission of pedagogic discourse in the educational setting.



Going back to Fig. 6.2.14, it can be gathered from the classroom oral discourse under examination that language in the classroom is text-based knowledge of the structural aspects, not necessarily including knowledge of its use in meaningful ways. The result is a kind of exercise-based talk, which makes it possible to learn a language through repetitive practice. This is evident in the way the interaction is centred around similar grammar exercises at the beginning and concluding stages of the lesson. Each exercise consists of a number of sentences of similar length and complexity, each with a blank for the insertion of the correct verb to be supplied by the students. An analytical review of the structure of the sentences set out in these exercises shows that mastery of the language is conceptualised as being developed through written and oral drills that lend themselves to easy repetitive practice and rote learning.

Furthermore, the sentences in the written exercises are found to be randomly accrued and isolated items lacking a common contextual base. Although individually each sentence makes sense, as a text it is not coherent or meaningful. The low level of contextualisation found, however, does not appear to influence the students' ability to understand what is required of them. This is probably because meaning is only operating at sentence level. As a result, it is not very difficult for them to come up with the correct answer, although the lack of a context may make it difficult for students to apply all that learning in situations beyond the sentence level. In fact, the sentences are constructed so as to make for easy prescriptive and expository teaching and assessments. This agrees with Lantolf's (2000) view that one of the main reasons for the prevailing view of language as object in schools is that teachers find it much easier to teach when the language is broken up into discrete parts. Moreover, assessments can be carried out and efficiently measured through the use of various objectively constructed tests and exams.

It is questionable, however, whether a focus on forms and structures alone is sufficient for actual learning to occur, if actual learning refers to learning which encompasses not only what is to be learnt, but also how what is being learnt can be used meaningfully. Apparently not, judging by the comments the teacher makes before and after the lesson recorded in the field notes taken on the lesson.

The perception gathered from the teacher's comments is that, although students are able to slot in the correct verb in grammar exercises immediately after instruction, they are not able to apply what they have learnt within a larger context, such as in continuous essay writing, for example. Furthermore, the common complaint among the English teachers during conversations and interviews is that, while students have few problems with structural knowledge, they experience considerable difficulty when asked to use this knowledge meaningfully within a context. This confirms strong arguments put forward by recent studies elsewhere that focus on forms in isolation from meaning may not result in language learning (Halliday, 1995; Christie; 1998; Long, 2001).

The third description of the classroom oral discourse is the distinctive instructional talk employed by the teacher in transmitting and conveying the rules and principles of the grammar topic. This talk is formal in structure, similar to that found in academic writing and lectures. There are no instances of the type of colloquial or casual language found in ordinary everyday conversations. Furthermore, this formal instructional talk appears to underline the unequal status between the teacher and students. First, it seeks to establish the authority the teacher holds over the students in classroom communication and second, it shows an impersonal relationship between the teacher and students. This is evident in the frequent use of modal verbs such as 'have/has to' and the second person pronoun "you/your", for example.

It has to be noted, however, that these aspects of instructional talk appear to be obvious only during the lesson in the classroom. The observations in this study show that out of the classroom, the teacher appears more relaxed and approachable. When students seek out the teacher in the staff room, for example, it is observed that there is a more personal and casual relationship. This suggests the existence, though unwritten, of two sets of reciprocal rules governing teacher-student behaviour, one in the classroom and the other outside the classroom. This confirms Allwright & Bailey's (1991) argument that certain routines and ground rules for classroom behaviour are necessary to maintain social harmony so that learning can take place without too many problems.

The instructional talk in the classroom is expressed in a fashion that can be conceptualized within an illustrative framework shown in Fig. 6.2.15.

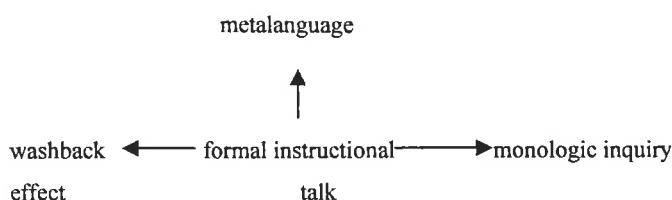


Fig. 6.2.15 The classroom instructional talk framework

Within this framework, the arrows show the three possible ways that the teacher's instructional talk expresses itself. One way is through the high frequency of metalinguistic use of the L2 by the teacher, especially in the transmission of the rules governing the grammar topic. Contrary to Lantolf's (2000) findings on how metalinguage talk does provide opportunities for learners to engage in negotiation of meanings in the Spanish L2 classroom, the same is not observed to be the case in this particular study. Here, the use of metalinguage appears to be completely within the domain of teacher talk. There is little attempt made, either by the teacher or the students, to clarify or negotiate the meanings of "nouns" or "subject" for example. In fact, it is questionable whether the students have actually grasped the metalinguistic expressions because they appear to be, even to the observer, abstracted from the whole language itself and therefore difficult to understand. It is also difficult to gauge whether students fully understand the instruction as they are frequently silent when asked a question. Even if there is a response, it is usually short, monosyllabic or unintelligible.

Instruction is also monologic, in the sense that the teacher is seen delivering considerably lengthy explanations and information that, whether consciously or not, deters students from interrupting. This finding supports Bourdieu's (1998) claim of an imperious quality in teacher classroom instruction that tends to shut out student participation. An analysis of this monologic instruction has led to the finding that, instead of creating opportunities for learners to find out the various ways the rules of the grammar topic can be used, the teacher employs a prescriptive and expository method in an attempt to transmit the rules and how

they should be used to produce grammatically correct sentences. From the findings, it becomes quite clear that there is not much room left for a two-way flow in communication between the teacher and students. It also appears that there is some kind of mutual agreement, albeit an unofficial one, that students are not expected to contribute much during teacher oral instruction.

The instructional talk is heavily peppered with constant references made to the exams and assessments documented in L2 studies elsewhere in Singapore (Cheah, 1998) and Hongkong (Cheng, 1997), for example. The teacher is seen to make frequent references, implicit and explicit, to the English composition paper in the G.C.E. 'O' level exams, for example. This leads to the suggestion that exams and assessments play a significant role in classroom instruction. In the lesson observed, detailed attention is paid to explaining the rules of the grammar and to correction. The teacher has also taken pains to remind students about the rationale behind all this teaching, namely to help students perform well in the exams. This is confirmed in the comments she makes after the lesson. In the retrospective verbal report, the teacher points out that students need to work on this particular topic in order to do well in their composition paper at the end of their school year.

Perhaps one of the two main revelations that can be gathered from the discussion here is that, contrary to popular belief in earlier ESL studies (Brown, 1998; Beardsmore, 1995; Cazden, 1988; Tsui, 1985) that there is a lack of communication, at least in the oral mode, in the classroom, the findings here suggest that this is not so. There is oral communication in the classroom – of a particular kind. Unlike ordinary conversation, communication in the classroom is not spontaneous but deliberate and purposeful, presumably aimed at fulfilling the teaching goals of the teacher. It encompasses certain features and perceptions - the three-part IRF exchange structure, the formal oral teacher instruction and the view of language as an object that can be delivered in an authoritative and detached manner. This finding relates to the views held in more recent writings on classroom interaction (Van Lier, 1998; Heslep, 2001) that the quality and quantity of communication differ from situation to situation and that thus there is a need to accept that communication in the classroom may be different from that in another context or situation. This leads to the other main revelation, and that is that the



discourse reflects or exhibits the overall socio-cultural structure of language learning in the school will be examined in the next chapter.

### Summary

This chapter provides an in-depth analytical narration of an English grammar lesson at the upper secondary level. The analysis has led to the identification and description of these talk features - (i) the prevalence of a three-part exchange structure consisting of the IRF move sequence, (ii) the use of text-based talk as a basis for interaction and (iii) a distinctive kind of instructional talk employed by the teacher in the transmission of facts and information. Further discussion found the IRF interaction pattern to be an established social practice in the classroom with the aim of gauging students' recall and understanding of the topic. The use of the written word provides a standardised and objective view of the language. Classroom interaction is therefore found to be deliberate, purposeful and economical with little room for spontaneity. The view of language learning as a commodity also allows for formal, authoritative and monologic teacher oral instruction. The conclusion drawn from the discussion of findings is that, contrary to what has been documented elsewhere, there is communication in the language classroom, but of a particular type, one that is specifically bound to the classroom situation. Finally, these features are seen to pervade all the three stages of the lesson. They are the socio-cultural practices of classroom talk. Together, they operate in a regular and recurrent fashion to form the classroom oral practices.

## Chapter 7

### Issues Posed in the Analysis of the Structure/Practice Relationship in Formal ESL learning

#### 7.0 Introduction

Before any attempt can be made to show the relationship between the socio-cultural structure and classroom talk, a number of issues need to be addressed, particularly issues that have to do with analysis. This chapter details these issues by first focusing on the notion of “context” in terms of the environment, such as the school setting over and beyond a particular event within it, which in this case is the talk that goes on in its language classrooms. Following from this is the provision of the general framework on which the analysis of context in this study is based. The last part of the chapter describes the integration of two specific models employed in the analysis process, both of which are drawn from sociolinguistics and sociology of education.

#### 7.1 The notion of “context” – a literature review

The centrality of the notion of “context” in this study requires that a detailed review of it is important. From readings of contextual studies in the various disciplines of sociology, anthropology, linguistics and more recently in education, the general consensus among writers and researchers is that the term “context” is particularly difficult to define (Malmkjaer & Williams, 1998; Toolan, 1996; Duranti & Goodwin, 1992). According to Duranti and Goodwin (1992), “context” means quite different things in different research disciplines, and so it may not be possible to assign it with a standard or direct definition. In writing about the conditions of contextual meaning in language learning, Widdowson (1998:9) claims that context is the “surroundings in the widest sense... an undefined mass indeed”. He concludes that because of the chaotic nature of the term, there will always be a problem of making “context” a manageable concept for accountability in any analysis in language learning.

In Sperber and Wilson (1986:15-16), context is “a psychological construct, a subset of the learner’s assumptions about the world”. According to them, it is the assumption, rather than the actual affairs of the world that influences the way an act or event is interpreted. Toolan (1996:4) asserts that “context” is largely invisible. It is there all around, what people do, but impossible to pin down, largely because it is “multiple and impossible of predetermined delimitation”. He concludes by claiming that “there is no such thing as *the context* ... there is only a recurrent activity of contextualizing” This is an important observation because it represents the stand this study takes - that by itself, “context” presents the invisible behaviour of members of the school community and therefore it may be difficult to subject such behaviour to analysis. Nevertheless, “context” can be realized in the micro processes - such as the talk features in the language classroom – within the school setting. Thus, the perception of the socio-cultural structure by itself is largely only that – a perception of the way the English language should be taught and learnt at the institutional level. Thus while it would be difficult to carry out a rigorous and robust analytical study of the structure, it can be realized through its actual operational processes at the classroom level, which in this case, are the talk which features in the language class. This accounts for an ethnographic/ethno-methodological approach to analysis discussed quite thoroughly in Chapter 3. Furthermore, it is a framework drawn from the work of researchers in the field of anthropology and sociology (Zimmerman & Boden, 1993; Mehan, 1975), a framework that will be elaborated upon in the following section of this chapter.

These studies take the viewpoint that it would be truly difficult to make sense of an event without addressing the environment, linguistic or otherwise, and therefore focus on the macro/micro contextual relationships become fundamental. What is more noticeable is the lack of such focus in language classroom studies, particularly in the ESL setting. It is my view that this has been an important missing factor in the L2 classroom studies. Unless the macro-micro relationship in formal language learning is being addressed, classroom studies will continue to provide only an incomplete picture of what actually goes on in the ESL classroom. This is to say that the event of learning a language is not isolated from the situation that surrounds it.



## 7.2 The argument for an analysis of “context” in ESL formal learning

Despite its abstraction and liberal variability, knowledge of the notion “context” in any event/situational study is fundamental because, like it or not, it permeates the behaviour of events embedded within it. In the field of interactional linguistics, for example, “context” is “indispensable to our making sense of language” (Toolan, 1996:4). Indeed, it would be difficult to talk about why people do what they do with the language if the event is divorced from the context surrounding it (Zimmerman & Boden, 1993; Gumperz, 1982; Goffman, 1974).

Context plays a central role in the socio-cultural theory of SLA, which forms the theoretical framework in this study. It is there, in the very definition of the theory provided in Chapter 2, taken from Lantolf (2000:225), and reiterated here for emphasis:

...with an emphasis on locating the individual within the collective, natural, and historical conditions. The entailment of a socio-cultural theory approach foreground sociality to individuality, language as socially constructed rather than internally intrinsic, language as both referential and constructive of social reality, and notions of distributed and assisted activity in contrast to individual accomplishment. There is a general tendency to derive the micro-processes of language learning and use from larger social, political, and historical contexts, and to understand what occurs within these frames of reference as mutually (though not necessarily equally) influencing one another”.

From this definition, two things become immediately clear. One is the centrality of the larger context in the language learning process, be it social, political or historical, and two, that the everyday practices of language learning can only be made better sense of through a study of the relationship between the wider context and its micro processes and the extent to which they influence one another. There is thus a definite call for more L2 studies that take into rigorous account the macro/micro relationship in language acquisition and learning.

Despite the potentially far-reaching insights such an approach can reveal about language learning in general and SLA in particular, such studies have, up to now, not been forthcoming. Research work in ESL classrooms has traditionally been located within the four walls of the classroom (Alwright, 1998; Breen, 1987, Nunan, 1987). There is the general reluctance, among researchers in language education, to expand the context of study to include the wider institutional environment. One reason may be because, for many classroom researchers, the institution is viewed as something separate from the classroom. Allwright (1998:123), in writing about contextual factors in classroom language learning, expresses his opinion on the macro/micro issue as follows:

I am personally willing to stay focused on micro- issues within an avowedly narrow institutional social context, conscious of what I may be missing by so doing, but even more conscious of what I may be missing if I am so bound up in trying to take vast geopolitical issues into account that I fail to do anything like justice to the role of social forces in everyday classroom interaction

This reflection of Allwright highlights two important arguments found in current classroom studies. First is that the macro context of language learning at the institutional level is distinct from and therefore may be unrepresentative of the micro processes at the classroom level. The second argument put forward is that a micro perspective focusing on the classroom itself is sufficient to demonstrate the issues of formal language learning. It is apparent that, as long as researchers believe that the macro context of language learning is detached from the interactive activities at the classroom level, classroom oriented research will continue to focus on micro issues, thus ignoring the relationship they share with the wider, macro context.

With due respect to Allwright's viewpoints on the macro-micro issues in language learning, I beg to disagree on two points. Based on the socio-cultural theory of SLA, the argument is that the actual act of learning a language is not separate from the assumptions held by the learner about the language in the wider environment surrounding it. Thus, the question-answer sessions between teachers

and learners in the classroom about the direct and indirect speech in English grammar, for example, are not something decided there and then by the teacher and then responded to by the learner. These are linked to the assumptions held about the concepts of learning at the institutional level. Without this link between the context and the event embedded within it, the act of asking and answering questions about the topic will make absolutely no sense. This leads to my second point. While current classroom studies have brought about valuable contributions to ESL learning, they do not give a complete picture of the language learning processes in a formal setting, such as the school. For a more coherent and in-depth comprehension of this process, classroom practices must take into consideration the perceptions about language learning in the wider school context. As such, the focus of any such study must be expanded to include the wider context over and above the classroom.

The second, more substantive, reason, in my view, is the difficulty of subjecting the “context” in the wider sense of the word to any kind of robust and rigorous analysis. Taking context to mean the surrounding in its widest sense, Widdowson (1998) expresses the problem of making context a “manageable” one for accounting for the practices that go on within it. This is largely because it is in Toolan’s (1996:4) words, “shockingly, liberatingly variable”. According to Widdowson, there are too many variables in the context surrounding the language classroom to say with certainty which influences classroom practices. Although he concludes by asserting that it is unhelpful to place context over practice, he suggests that more studies should be carried out that examine the macro/micro relationship along a continuum. In a sense, this means to frame micro issues against the background of its macro processes. Widdowson felt that such studies could provide insights that are particularly useful to language learners.

Halliday (1985:46) calls the context beyond that of the classroom a “context of culture”. Using the example of the school, he explains this context as constituting “the unspoken assumptions about learning and the place of learning within it”, such as the concept of education and curriculum, the notion of the curriculum and of school subjects, the complex role structures of teachers, principals and inspectors and so forth. He goes on to state that there is no analytical framework

to subject the term “context of culture” to explicit study largely because there is as yet no “separate linguistic model of the context of culture” (p.47). However, he qualifies this claim by saying that “in describing the context of situation [classroom practices], it is helpful to build in some indication of the cultural background [context of culture], and the assumptions that have to be made if the text is to be interpreted – or produced – in the way the teacher (or the system) intends.” What Halliday is saying then, is that there exists no model or framework for analyzing the context in its widest sense, but that its assumptions can be *realized* through a study of the classroom practices.

These arguments put forward with regards to the difficulty of subjecting the notion of “context” to analytical study are appreciated. However, an examination of context is indispensable in order for practices, linguistic or otherwise, to make sense and meaning (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Toolan, 1996; Lantolf, 2000; Van Lier, 2000). The underlying message in Widdowson (1998) and Halliday (1985; 1994) must be highlighted – that in language learning, there is a need to make explicit the structure/practice relationship so as to provide new insights about language learning, be it the first, second or foreign language situation. The issue is not about context per se, nor classroom practices per se, but a context/event relationship. It is this relationship that this study strives to address.

### 7.3 The exploration of the socio-cultural structure in the L2 classroom talk

In subjecting the socio-cultural structure to an in-depth analytical study, the framework for analysis is one that is drawn from an integration of methodologies from various disciplines in socio-linguistics and social sciences. One issue central to the analysis is to consider what should or should not be included in the context under study. From reading on contextual studies in sociology (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Kress, 1985), it becomes clear that “context” can constitute an indefinitely large number of variables or factors considered to be relevant and significant to the analysis. In Bateson’s (1972:459) words, it is important to “draw the limiting line in such a way that you do not cut away any of these pathways in ways that leave things inexplicable”. In other words, for the useful study of any context, the salient factors or variables must be extracted and highlighted because

these factors form the crux of what constitutes that particular context. In this study, the point of departure for examining the wider school context of formal ESL instruction takes into consideration what Duranti and Goodwin (1992) call “the perspective of the participant(s) whose behaviour is being analysed”. In particular, the context in this instance is one that is shaped by the perceptions held by the principal, teachers and students about the English language teaching and learning in the school setting. These perceptions are further supported by a review of the relevant school documents collected in an attempt to discover the objectives and goals of ESL instruction at the institutional level. The result is a context of language learning expressed through four important factors – assessment, authority, academic skills acquisition and structural competence – that constitute the socio-cultural structure as shown in Chapter 5.

However, it is also apparent that the structure, no matter how thoroughly it has been investigated, remains largely a speculative concept. It is in effect the conversion of the members’ notions, the researcher’s intuitions and casual observations of a phenomenon, and therefore cannot be scientifically analysed by itself (Schegloff, 1993; Brown, Malmkjaer, Pollit & Williams, 1994). From sociological and linguistic studies, it is clear that structure cannot be analysed but is *realized by the participants’ interaction within it* (Goffman in Giglioli, 1977; Zimmerman & Boden, 1993; Halliday, 1985, 1994; Toolan, 1996; Brown, 1998; Lantolf, 2000; Bernstein, 2000). Moreover, through these studies, it is found that the value of contextual studies is not so much about obtaining knowledge of the context, but to discover it in the members’ worlds, to provide clarification on why members in a community do the things they do. Indeed, it is this very discovery that captures the purpose of this study – to show the extent to which the socio-cultural structure of ESL formal instruction in the school is realized in the language classroom talk in order to (i) make sense of the oral behaviour in the language classroom and (ii) to provide constructive directions for changes or modifications in the overall ESL programme in the school.

Thus, of particular relevance to the analytical framework is the ethnographic/ethno-methodological approach reviewed in Chapter 3, particularly with specific reference to the sociological studies on social structure and talk relationship in

different specific contexts (Zimmerman & Boden, 1993). Here, the notion of “context” is seen to be as much an integral part of the concept of social structure as the talk that participants engage in within it. For example, the context that characterizes talk in the courtroom or in a classroom is both relevant to the characterization of the social formations that make up the courtroom or classroom. It may be appropriate, at this juncture, to look in detail at what Zimmerman and Boden (1993:5) define as structure, as it encapsulates the rationale behind the analysis in this particular study:

“structure” refers to some domain of orderly relationships among specified units, that is, the site of regular, repetitive, non-random events that stand in a systematic relationship to one another.

From this definition of “structure”, it is understood that the study of any social structure can only be realized from instances of the talk patterns that goes on among the participants within it. In addition, it is not only just a realization of random talk patterns, but in regular, repetitive and consistent interaction features. Thus, in this study, prior to subjecting the socio-cultural structure to any form of analysis, a study of the classroom talk during the English lesson is carried out to identify the recurrent, systematic and regular talk features. In Chapter 6, an analysis of an English lesson found that classroom talk consists of three significant features – the 3-part I-R-F teacher-student exchange, the distinctive teacher oral instruction and the text-based talk.

However, it has to be noted that there must be an initial idea of what constitutes the “structure” of any context in the first place before knowing whether it has been realized or not in its micro-processes. Particularly in this study, the initial concept of the socio-cultural structure of ESL formal instruction is that evolved from the beliefs and values held by members of the school community about ESL learning (see Chapter 5). As such, it is a perceived phenomenon in school ESL learning, an organization of certain social and cultural elements operating in the context of the school setting, which is then substantiated or realized in classroom oral practices.

To explore the extent to which the structure of ESL instruction is expressed and realized in the language classroom, an integrative approach to method of analysis is adopted, informed from methods documented in studies in the field of anthropology, linguistics and education (Gumperz, 1982a; Basso, 1992; Halliday, 1985, 1994; Bernstein, 2000). Of particular relevance are Halliday's (1985) situation/text linguistic model and Bernstein's (1996, 1999, 2000) classification and framing values, both of which will now be described in some detail.

Halliday (1985, 1994) employs the text/situation model to characterize the functions and meanings of texts produced in a particular situation shown in Fig. 7.1.

SITUATION: Feature of the context	(realized by)	TEXT: Functional component of semantic system
Field of discourse (what is going on)		Experiential meanings (transitivity, naming, etc)
Tenor of discourse (who are taking part)		Interpersonal meanings (mood, modality, person, etc)
Mode of discourse (role assigned to language)		Textual meanings (theme, information, cohesive relations)

*Fig. 7.1 Relation of the text to the context of situation (Halliday, 1985:26)*

According to Halliday (1985) the context of any situation can be most efficiently described in terms of a framework consisting of three features shown on the left hand side of the text/situation model in Fig. 7.1, the field, the tenor and the mode. The field describes what actually goes on in the language in that situation, that is what the participants are engaged in and the type of social actions taking place. The tenor reveals the participants involved in the language, their roles and their social relationships and the mode of the discourse shows the part the language is playing, what the participants expect the language to do for them in that situation and also the channel of communication, that is whether it is spoken or written or both. Halliday believes that knowledge of the field, tenor and mode of a particular

situation can provide a comprehensive understanding of the functions and meanings of that situation, be it a social, cultural or language learning one.

However, the field, tenor and mode of the discourse of that situation can only be realized from examining the functions and meanings of the text(s) produced by the participants within it. How this is achieved is by studying the functional linguistic components of the texts through an analysis of its functional grammar (Halliday, 1994) as shown on the right hand side of the model in Fig. 7.1. Thus, one possible way of looking at what the language is doing in a particular situation, the experiential meanings of its text(s) is extracted to show the types of processes at work in the clauses, for example. So, instead of assigning purely grammatical units like subject, verb and object, the units in the clause or sentence are given functional terms like participant/ sener, process (relational or material) and goal/phenomenon. A basic example could be the statement "Joe bought a car" in response to the question: "Do you know what Joe bought?" From this sentence, the processes involve the possession (bought) of a goal (a car) by the participant (Joe). Viewed from the functional viewpoint, it is easy to see what is happening in the language: the kind of action carried out by the participant to possess a goal.

When it comes to the tenor of the discourse, the interpersonal meanings of the text(s) are invoked. The functional linguistic markers to describe the tenor can be those pertaining to the mood elements expressed, such as the demand/give distinction in the question patterns, for example, or in the modality of the text, such as the use of modal verbs like "will" or "must" to show authority or in the use of person pronouns such as "I" and "you" to show exclusive ownership or authority and "we" to show inclusive power relationships.

Similarly, the mode of the discourse in a particular situation is realized in the textual meanings expressed in the text, particularly by analyzing the functions of linguistic markers like the use of cohesive devices such as anaphoric and exophoric references, conjunctions and occurrences of pronominalizations. The mode can also be expressed by looking at the theme and rheme of the clauses or sentences in the text(s). Such markers can provide important information about the



role of the language in that particular situation and how the participants intend the meanings of the text(s) to be expressed.

Halliday's (1985, 1994) text/situation linguistic model is particularly relevant to the analysis of the school/classroom relationship in this study because it provides a framework for describing and comparing the functions and meanings of the institutional discourse of ESL instruction expressed in the texts produced by the members within the school community and those of the oral behaviour of the teachers and students in the actual texts of talk produced in the language classroom.

While this study adopts Halliday's (1985, 1994) text/situation model in describing the relationship between the regulative discourse at the institutional level and the oral behaviour of the teachers and students at the classroom level, the strength of this relationship is measured in terms of Bernstein's (1996, 2000) classification and framing values. In particular, he employs the classification and framing principles to strengthen his analysis of the transmitter (institution)/acquirer (learner) relationship in schools with regards to the transmission of the social rules of pedagogical discourse set out at the institutional level. Consequently, Bernstein is interested in finding out the extent to which children in the classroom (i) recognize these rules and (ii) realize such rules in their interaction with the teachers in the classroom. He goes on to develop a construct that demonstrates the concepts of classification and framing both between and within contexts. This is shown in Fig. 7.2.

The classificatory principle indicates the significant features of pedagogical discourse at the institutional level. In other words, it provides the key to the distinguishing features of the discourse at the institutional level as shown in Fig. 7.2. In a way, the classificatory principle also seeks to distinguish the institutional context from the interactional practices in the classroom context. Inherent within this principle is the development of what is known as the recognition rules.

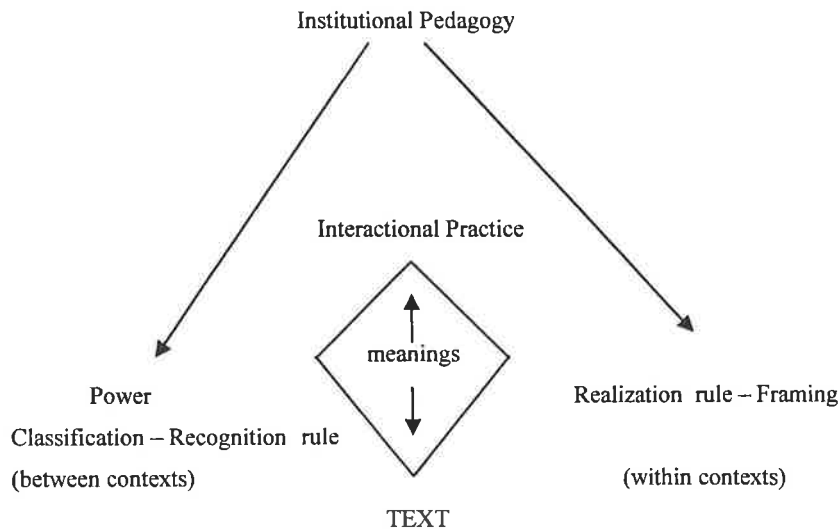


Fig. 7.2 Pedagogic context (Bernstein, 1996:107)

These rules, at the level of the acquirer (learner), operate to show the orientation of the interaction of participants in the classroom to what is expected, or legitimate at the institutional level. An example here might be taken from this study. One of the main features of the institutional discourse of ESL learning (the regulative discourse) is grammar instruction, that is a strong grasp of the grammatical units that make up the English language. In the classroom, both the language teacher and the students share a common recognition rule about this feature in the institutional context, which orientates their interactional practices to the significance of grammar competence in this context. The extent to which the recognition rules, with regards to this particular feature, are adhered to by the interactional practices in the classroom determines the strength of the classification principle.

Moreover, value indicators are assigned to the classification principle, such as +C to indicate strong classification and -C to indicate weak classification. Thus, a +C shows a strong orientation of interactional practices towards the institutional rules of language discourse, while a -C represents a deviation from the institutional discourse. The recognition rules also refer to power relations between the two contexts. Thus, the stronger the recognition rules (+C), the more pronounced will be the boundaries between them. The vice versa will be true for instances of weak recognition rules (-C).

The framing concept, on the other hand, refers to the control of transmission rules of a particular discourse within a context. Thus, while the classification principle provides the limits of a discourse within a particular context, framing provides the form of the realization of that discourse. In other words, it has to do with how that discourse is being acquired within its micro processes. As such, framing has to do with realization rules, the actual transmission of the discourse observed in the meanings of interactional practice and texts produced by children in the classroom (see Fig. 7.2). In this study, for example, framing refers to the actual production of talk texts within the context of the language classroom, translated into the extent of control the acquirer (the learner) has over the transmitter (the teacher as part of the institution) in the transmission of the rules of the institutional discourse. The extent to which the realization rules orientate to the transmission rules laid down at the institutional level determines the strength of the framing.

As with the classificatory principle, the strength of framing is measured in terms of value indicators +F and -F, where +F represents strong framing and -F indicates weak framing. As a follow up to the example given above, suppose the transmission rules for grammar learning in the school are the oral drill and recitation of grammar rules. If the realization rules (expressed in the actual talk texts in the classroom) are rote learning and oral drills, then there is strong framing (+F), both between the two activities within the classroom context and between the classroom context and institutional context. The vice versa will be true for weak framing (-F).

The analysis in this study adopts a revised version of Bernstein's (1996, 2000) classification/ framing values in looking at the institution/language classroom relationship in ESL learning. Thus, while Halliday's (1985, 1994) text/situation linguistic model is adapted to provide a comprehensive description of the relationship between the regulative discourse of ESL instruction at the institutional level and the talk features at the classroom level, Bernstein's (1996, 2000) classification and framing values operate to demonstrate the strength of this relationship, all of which will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

## Summary

This chapter begins by looking at the notion of “context” in readings from various studies in sociology, education and socio-linguistics. The conclusion drawn is that the term defies any kind of standard definition due to its abstract and variable nature. Certainly, this means that subjecting the “context” in its widest sense to analysis can be complicated and difficult. However, the issue of expanding the focus of study in language classrooms to the wider school environment is seen to be both desirable and necessary if a complete picture of formal classroom language learning is to be achieved. From sociological studies, it becomes apparent that while it may not be possible to subject the “context” to direct and explicit analysis, it can nevertheless be *realized* in the micro processes operating within it. Providing relevant examples of some contextual studies from sociology and socio-linguistics, a framework for analyzing the school/classroom discourse in ESL learning is developed. Specifically, this is an integrative framework based on an adaptation of Halliday’s (1985,1994) text/situation linguistic model of describing the functions and meanings of texts and situation and a revision of Bernstein’s (1996, 2000) classification and framing values to ascertain the power relations and control of pedagogical discourse between the institution and the students in the classroom.

## Chapter 8

### The Socio-cultural Structure of ESL Formal Instruction In Classroom Talk

#### 1. Introduction

Following from the discussion of the issues involved in the analysis of the macro/micro contextual relationship, this chapter details the relationship between the socio-cultural structure of ESL formal instruction and the classroom talk. It does this in three progressive stages. The first stage is to provide a comprehensive description of the function and meaning of the perceived socio-cultural structure in ESL school learning operating at the institutional level. This is followed by the second stage, which is to extract the functions and meanings of the talk texts produced by the teacher and students during the English lesson at classroom level. At both levels, the functions and meanings are expressed through a linguistic analysis of the texts produced, in the form of interviews with the principal, teachers and students, written documents such as the teacher's lesson notes in the record books and English language exam papers and classroom oral interaction. A framework is then constructed to demonstrate the relationship between the two levels. From the framework, it is possible to arrive at two main findings, namely (i) that it is possible to demonstrate, from a study of the structure/practice relationship, the existence of a socio-cultural structure in ESL formal instruction in the school, and (ii) that such a framework can form the bases for discussing not only the kind of relationship that exists between structure and practice, but also the strength of this relationship.

#### 8.1 The characterization of the socio-cultural structure at the institutional level

In Chapter 5, it is found that the ESL learning in the school setting is based on a re-contextualising principle that operates to select and transform the English language in its unmonitored state to one that is appropriate for dissemination as a

subject in the classroom. The result of this re-contextualising principle is a socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction. At the institutional level, this structure is perceived to contain four significant features – assessment, academic skills, hierarchical authority and structural competence.

Identification of the structure alone, however, may not help in showing how it is realized in the way the language is taught and learnt in the classroom. It is felt that, for a more robust study, a study of the characteristics of the features that make up the socio-cultural structure is both necessary and desirable. Using specific texts, from both the documents collected and the interview transcripts, an analysis is carried out on the features of the regulative discourse. The description of their functions and meanings is based on Halliday's (1985) text/situation functional grammar model. In particular, the analysis of the texts produced will be expressed in terms of the field, tenor and mode of the discourse.

Accordingly, the authority feature in the regulative discourse is subjected to a functional analysis based on two spoken texts taken from the interview transcripts. The first text reads as follows:

Text 1

S5	no!
S1	we use slang
S5	not really
S2	if you talk to the teacher, no
S4	only if we talk among ourselves
S2	it's [the school language] helpful if you talk to those high class people
S1	principals, high commissioners


Text 1 is taken from the student group interview (see Appendix 12: SG1) involving one set of students. The topic is on the English language they are taught in the classroom and required to use in the school setting with their teachers and principal. By re-constructing the text, cohesive devices in the form of signalling the negative/positive determiners and pronouns to their references provides important clues to the characteristics of the authority at the institutional level:

Text 1

- 1 S5 no! {we do not use the school code among ourselves}
- 2 S1 {yes} we use slang
- 3 S5 not really {we do not talk slang in the classroom}
- 4 S2 if you talk to the teacher, no
- 5 S4 {yes} only if we talk among ourselves
- 6 S2 it's [the school code] helpful if you talk to those high class people
- 7 S1 {yes} principals, high commissioners

Key: 1 text line number

S1 individual student, identity known, kept anonymous for confidentiality

The text has been made more explicit by filling in the elliptical forms, presented here as utterances between the curly brackets { }. In this way, the original meaning of the text is kept intact while at the same time, the text is open to easier analysis. The positive/negative determiner is underlined and the qualifying element is in italics. The arrow (  ) is an indicating marker and acts to point the determiner to its particular qualifying referent. By signalling the negative/positive determiner to its qualifying referent, it is possible to reveal the distinction between the legitimate linguistic code (standard British English) used in the school setting and the more casual and colloquial use known as “slang” by the students.

When asked if they would talk to one another in the school linguistic code, that is the language they are taught in, the answer is an emphatic ‘no!’ (S5:1). S1 in line 2 reveals that when among themselves, they use slang. This slang is a mixture of the standard variety of English and Malay, quite similar to the structure of the Singlish variety (Platt, Weber & Ho, 1984) and therefore far different from the grammatically correct standard variety being promoted in school learning. S5 (line 3) is quick to add that no, they do not use slang, in the classroom, a point further clarified by S4 in line 4 that no, they do not use slang particularly with the teacher. This is probably because they view the teacher as a representative of the institution and therefore it would not be appropriate to use any other variety except standard English. Furthermore, it appears that the students are very much aware that the use of slang would be out of place among the educated elite group. This is evident in the next two lines. In line 6, the school linguistic code is linked to “high class people” (S2) such as “principals and high commissioners” (S1: 7).

From this short text, it can be suggested that the school language is (i) academic in structure and used only for purpose of obtaining formal knowledge and (ii) detached and impersonal and not used in intimate domains like in friendship and family matters and (iii) the language of the educated elite and is therefore helpful to social class mobility. In a sense, it enjoys a superior status to the colloquial slang.

When it comes to the social relationship between the teachers and students, a text is extracted from an interview with a teacher for analysis (see Appendix 12: T2). Here, the teacher offers her perception of the classroom relationship between teachers and students.

Using Halliday’s (1994) experiential features of material and mental processes of recognition, affection and perception, it is possible to show the social relationship between the teachers and students in the school. The slashes in each text line serve to highlight the functional elements: senser/participant, process and phenomenon/goal.



Text 2

1. I | don't really like | [that [students getting personal with teachers]]  
senser process: affection phenomenon
  
2. | I | want them to know that there's still... you know, | the difference between a student and the  
teacher|  
senser process: recognition phenomenon
  
3. Because | I | think some of the children | do get beyond |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon
  
4. | They | talk too easily and too ... they're too familiar | with the teachers|  
participant process: material goal
  
5. And | I | don't like the way they | { }... it|  
senser process: affection phenomenon
  
6. | It | will be | difficult, later on in the classroom itself, when it comes to discipline|  
senser process: recognition phenomenon
  
7. | They | look at you | too much as a friend|  
senser process: perception phenomenon
  
8. So, | I | do maintain | a distance|  
senser process: material phenomenon

Key:

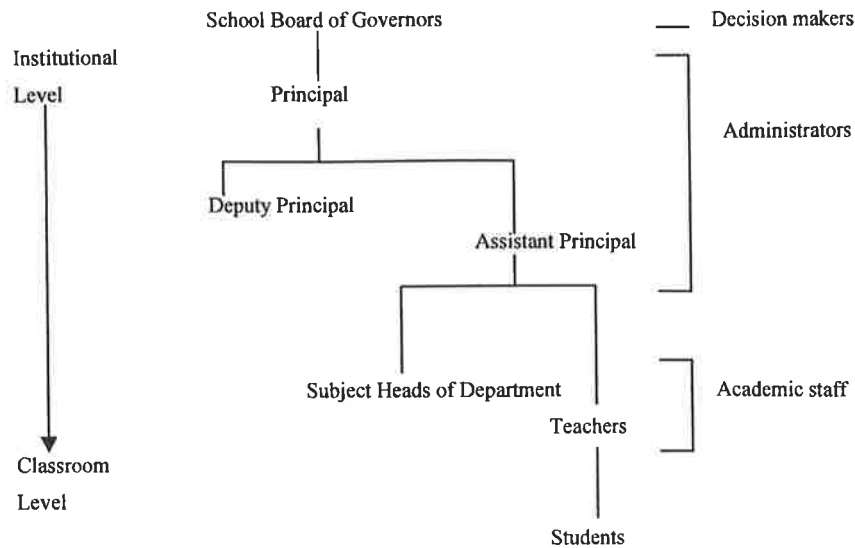
- | | markers indicating the functional elements of senser/participant, process and phenomenon/goal
- { } elliptical forms

The material process refers to processes of “doing”. It expresses the notion of one person/ thing actually doing something to some other person/ thing. The mental processes, on the other hand, have to do with those of “sensing”, whether it is a verbal phrase of affection (such as “like”, “love”) or recognition (such as “think”) and so forth. These processes are realized in the verbal

phrases in the text. The mental processes involve both a senser and a phenomenon. Here, the senser would be the participant who feels or thinks or believes, while the phenomenon would be the other element, namely, a thing or a fact which is felt, or thought or believed. The material process involves the participant who does something and the goal the thing or fact that is being done.

An analysis of the mental processes in the text suggests quite clearly that the teacher does not think it is a good idea for students and teachers to develop a close relationship: “I don’t really like that” (line 1). She thinks that students and teachers should keep strictly to their roles of instructor and learner: “I want them to know that there’s still ... the difference between students and teachers” (line 2) because she thinks students will take advantage of the situation (“get beyond” in line 3) if the roles are blurred. In line 4, she reiterates her view against a personal teacher-student relationship when she says that she does not like the way students (expressed as actor in the third person) talk too easily and familiarly with the teachers (indicated by ellipsis). This is probably again because she believes that it will be difficult for teachers to enforce classroom discipline. The material process in line 8 shows what she does to avoid developing a close personal relationship with her students: she maintains a distance and does not get too involved in her students’ personal lives. This is to say that she draws certain boundaries of what students are permitted or not permitted to do in the relationship. At no time should students cross the line.

The analysis is further supported by the administrative and academic structure of the school. By examining it within the constraints of English language learning at the secondary school level, the following organizational chart can be shown diagrammatically and discussed:



The School Board of Governors, as a committee consisting of members selected from the local community, sets out the rules directing the ESL learning within the school. While the general consideration behind the topics to be taught and learnt at the different class levels is the syllabus provided by the curriculum developers in the Ministry of Education, the rules for the transmission of the pedagogic discourse are based on the beliefs and values held by the members of the school board. The result is the establishment of a set of socio-cultural rules outlining the transmission of the English language learning in the school.

One such belief, for example, is that acquisition is not complete unless students are taught the grammar rules of the English language. Directly below the school board is the Principal, who heads the administration team, consisting of the Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal. Their main duty is to draw up the pedagogic practices of ESL instruction, based on the socio-cultural rules of institutional discourse at the top. So, apart from working out what aspects of the language is to be learnt at which level, they also decide on how best to transmit the rules of the English language as a school subject. Below the school administration is the academic staff, made up of the various Subject Heads of Departments and Teachers. Their duty is to transmit the rules of English language learning in the classroom and to prepare students to sit for their exams and assessments. The academic staff are in direct contact with the students, who occupy the bottom rung of the structure. In particular, the school board, administrators and academic staff each bring with them their particular beliefs and

values about ESL instruction based on their respective social, cultural and educational backgrounds. Students, as learners and acquirers of the language are expected to assimilate everything that is being transmitted to them from the top and then reproduce the knowledge acquired in this manner in order to fulfil the goals and objectives of English language learning in the school.

The diagram highlights a hierarchical structure of authority both in terms of power and function. It is not difficult to see that the power rests at the top end of the structure – the Institutional Level consisting of the School Board of Governors, the Administration and to a certain extent, the Academic Staff. The students, at the bottom end of the structure of authority, are assumed to have the least power over what and how they learn the language. Thus, at the institutional level, the School Board of Governors and Administrators decide what should be learnt (based on the syllabus from the Ministry of Education) and also the rules of transmission (based on the socio-cultural values of the members at this level). It may be decided, at this level, for example, that grammar teaching is important, and that the best way to teach it is by drilling students into knowing the grammar forms at sentence level.

The diagram also shows that there are very specific functions and roles assigned to each level. At the institutional level, the transmission rules and practices of ESL formal instruction are laid down. The academic staff is then responsible for implementing these rules and practices in the language classroom. Because each group is assigned very specific roles and duties, there is very little overlap in terms of functions. As a result, the social relationship among the groups in the structure of authority is formal and impersonal, one where the blurring of boundaries is discouraged.

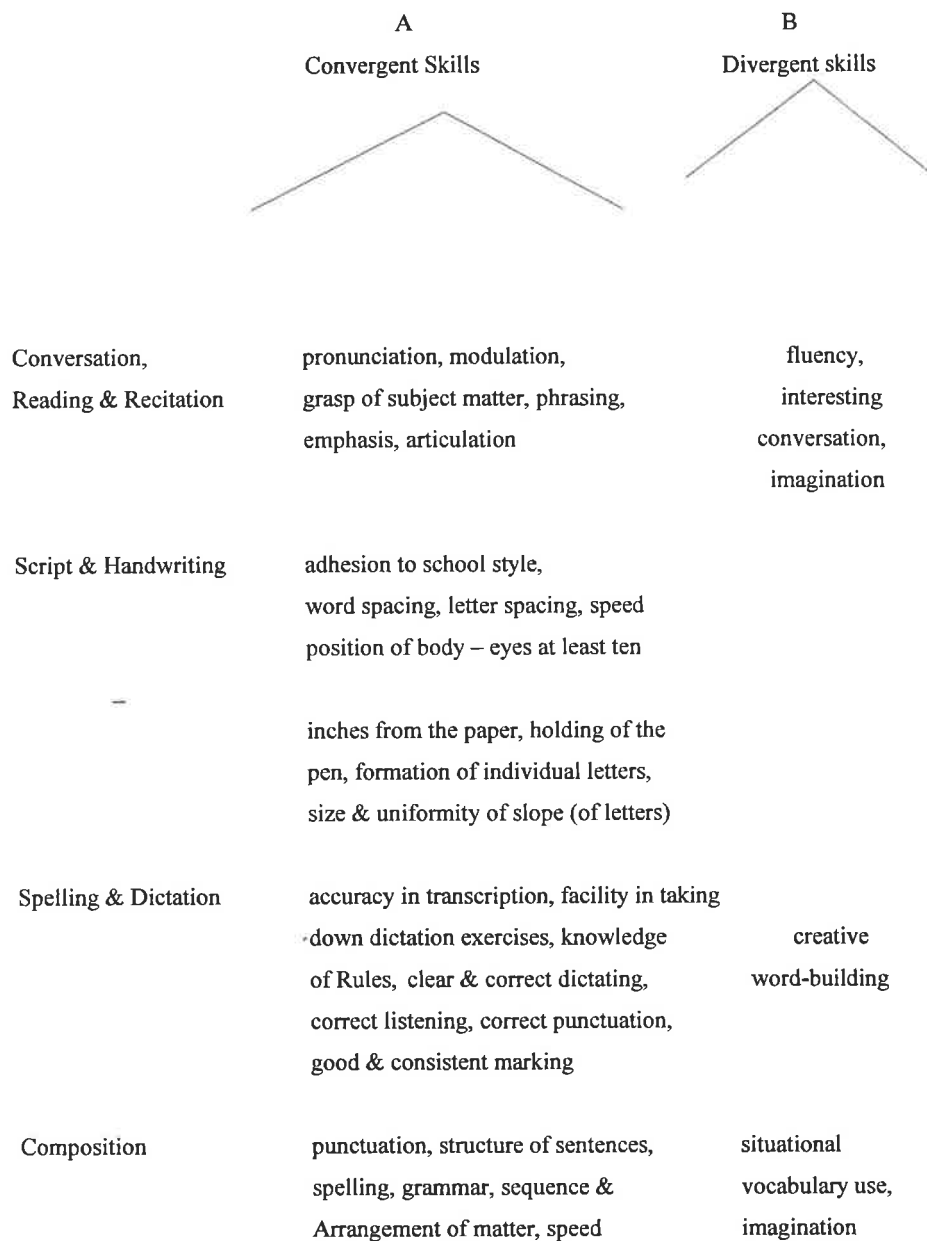
This hierarchical nature of authority serves to further demonstrate the large power distance among the four groups. The lower down the rung the group is, the further away it is from authoritative power. There is therefore, a remote relationship between students and the school board or even between students and the administrators. In fact, the only representative of the institution that students come into any direct contact with are the teachers. Thus, students' awareness of the

rules of English language learning comes directly from their language teachers. Even here, the relationship is formal and respectful. The discouragement of a close and personal relationship between teachers and students is clearly demonstrated through the obligatory adornment of school uniforms by students. This is a tradition handed down by the British system of education. Whatever the purpose behind the wearing of uniforms is, it is plainly observed that it seeks to separate the students from teachers. The uniform identifies the student as a learner, and therefore someone who has little authoritative power within the school.

In terms of communication, the single downward pointing arrow in the diagram shows a unidirectional flow of communication, in the sense that it comes down from the top (the Institutional Level) to the bottom (the Classroom Level). In the school culture, this unidirectional flow in communication ensures that one set of rules is being effectively transmitted and that negotiation is not entertained. It can be said that the interests of the institution are emphasized over those of learners. Within such a culture, the idea is to attain what works best for the school, and therefore students, in terms of language learning.

Next, an analysis is carried out on the functions and meanings of the language skills to be taught and learnt at the institutional level. In this instance, the text is taken from the four skills listed in the written guidelines on English language instruction in the teacher's record book (see Appendix 11). The document is divided into two columns. Under one column is a list of skills to be acquired in English language learning: conversation, reading and recitation, script and handwriting, spelling and dictation and composition writing. Listed under the other column are the qualitative features of these skills that the teacher is expected to transmit in their teaching. By looking at how these features collocate synonymously, a hyponomic relationship is set up under two dichotomous skill concepts, where features such as pronunciation and punctuation, for example, are shown as "kinds of" A, while features such as interesting conversation and creative word building are shown as "kinds of" B. Taking A to be convergent skills and B to be divergent skills, it is possible to gather these features into two

broad categories. Because of the ambiguity of some features, only those specific and well-defined ones are taken into account. This hyponymy is shown as follows:



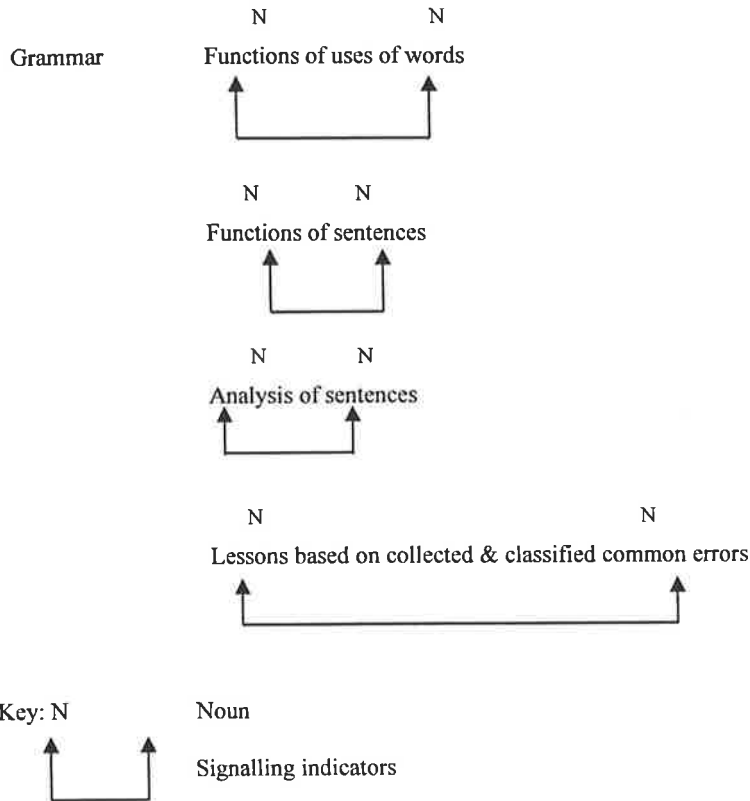
In the figure shown above, Convergent skills refer to skills that adhere to a conservative, inward view of language learning. Essentially, such skills require the mastery of a specific set of pre-determined and objective rules. Thus, these are standardized, codified and highly academic. Divergent skills, on the other hand, are autonomous and spontaneous with a strong element of liberal and free expression of language use. As a result, there are less specific boundaries in divergent skills than convergent skills. As such, convergent skills acquisition has

to do with learning the language to perform in academic exams, to get good jobs and be socially acceptable within the educated circle. Divergent skills include an intrinsic element: appreciating the play of words, to develop creativity in using the language, enjoying the aesthetic aspects of poems, plays and so forth.

The figure also shows that, at the institutional level, there is a lot more interest invested in the acquisition of convergent than divergent skills. Students are taught to acquire the correct ways of “doing” the language. One example is in the writing skills, where mastery is restricted to the basic rules of penmanship such as the way to hold a pen, tracing the shape of letters, and so forth. Even in the area of continuous writing (composition), emphasis is on correct punctuation, grammar and spelling. In reading, understanding is based on the grasp of subject matter rather than the critical appreciation of the argument in a reading text. Listening skills are reduced to correct listening and regurgitation. It is also clear that from the school’s viewpoint, divergent skills are not considered appropriate skills to acquire, probably because they are deemed not to fit into the social rules of ESL teaching and learning within the school setting. Convergent skills training is also preferred because then students will be acquiring skills that have been set out for them at the institutional level, thus preserving the power and control of the transmission rules of the pedagogic discourse at the top.

The meaning of structural competence, especially grammar instruction, at the institutional level, is reflected in the school document (see Appendix 11 under Grammar) that appears in the teaching instructions for teachers in the record book. This is shown in Text 3. An examination of the nominal features of the text is carried out to identify the functions of the nominal groups. As with the language skills acquisition, there are some features in the document that have not been elaborated upon and therefore remain ambiguous. These have been left out of the analysis. The word class used for describing linguistic signaling here is the noun group (N), for example “function”, “words”, “sentences”, “lessons”, and “common errors”.

Text 3



The arrows act as indicators signaling each noun to its noun referent. These nouns, however, are realized functionally by renaming them as “Thing” and its “Classifier” (Halliday, 1994). Thus, a noun that functions as a Thing is the labelling or naming of an object or phenomenon or feature. The noun as a Classifier indicates a subset or characteristic of the Thing in question. An example would be the phrase “inflectional morphology”, where “morphology” is the Thing in question and “inflectional” is a subclass and therefore the Classifier of “morphology”.

By rewriting Text 3 functionally as Thing + Classifier, the following pattern is observed:

	Thing	+	Classifier
1.	word		function
2.	sentence		formation



3. sentence analysis
4. common errors lessons

Rephrased in this way, certain characteristics in grammar instruction at the institutional level become clear. The emphasis in grammar instruction is on word, sentence and errors classified in terms of word/sentence formation, function, analysis and lesson drill. Word function (1) refers to the teaching and learning of the different word classes (verbs, nouns, adjectives and so forth) and what they do, particularly in the formation of sentences (2). In order to form a grammatically correct sentence, students are expected to know the order of nouns, verbs, adjectives and so forth. Apart from knowing the structural rules of sentence formation, students are also required to learn how to analyse these sentences in terms of subject, verb, object and where they occur in English sentences. Emphasis is also placed on the common errors in English words and sentences. One way to correct these errors is to introduce drill lessons to help students overcome them. From the textual analysis carried out, it is found that structural competence, at the institutional level involves not only an emphasis on grammar but on the grammar at the word and sentence levels and correction of errors at these levels. Language learning is not about using the grammar within a meaningful context, but in isolated, abstracted instances.

It is also found in Chapter 5, that a significant element in the regulative discourse is assessment. One way to study the kind of assessment that students are prepared for ultimately is to carry out a text analysis (Text 4) of the grade descriptions for the assessment of continuous writing in the BGCE “O” Levels (Brunei-Cambridge general certificate of Education “Ordinary” levels) English paper (see Appendix 6c). Here, the selection of the noun and its accompanying adjective in the text is identified to give a clear indication of the function and meaning of the assessment. Moreover, the noun is given the functional label of “Thing” in question, and the accompanying adjective, the Epithet, indicating some qualitative property of the “Thing” itself. Thus, in “accurate spelling”, for example, spelling is the “Thing” (converted metaphorically from an activity to be a Thing) in question and “accurate” is the Epithet because it describes the spelling.

Text 4

Apart from very occasional slips, the language is accurate. Sentence structure is varied and demonstrates the candidate's skill to use different lengths and types of sentences for particular effects. Vocabulary is wide and precise. Punctuation is accurate and helpful to the reader. Spelling is accurate across the full range of vocabulary used. Paragraphs have unity, are linked, and show evidence of planning. The topic is addressed with consistent relevance; the interest of the reader is aroused and sustained.

In this text, both the Thing and the Epithet are marked as: Thing by solid underlining and Epithet by broken underlining. By using these two linguistic functional markers, it is possible to draw up a list of the function and meaning of the assessment element at the institutional level:

<u>Epithet</u>	<u>Thing</u>
accurate	language
varied	sentence structure
wide, precise	vocabulary
accurate	punctuation
accurate	spelling
unified	paragraph structure
consistent, relevant	topic adherence
aroused, sustained	reader interest

A look down the list of things assessed shows that, apart from reader interest, the emphasis is on basic structural features. Assessment in language learning is taken to mean accurate uses of tenses, plurality, subject-verb agreement and so forth. Good sentence structure pertains to the correct formation of the types of simple and complex clauses and phrases that make up sentences. Vocabulary is assessed by the application of new, unfamiliar words learnt and their accurate application in continuous writing. Punctuation has to do with the correct use of the full stop, question mark, quotation mark and so forth. In fact, the only feature that is not based on structure is the use of imaginative language to arouse and sustain reader

interest, although, what it is, has not been defined in any satisfactory sense. Moreover, in the overall picture of the “Things” being assessed, this forms but a small part of the assessment. From the list of the accompanying epithets, it is clear that the aim is for accuracy, with “accurate” or its equivalent appearing four times in total. In a significant sense, the function and meaning of assessment in language learning reflects symmetrically the properties inherent in the make-up of the regulative discourse.

From the foregoing analyses of texts, it is possible to describe the regulative discourse in terms of Halliday’s (1985, 1994) text/situation descriptive model constituting the Field of discourse, Tenor of discourse and Mode of discourse. If the Field is taken to mean what is going on with ESL instruction at the institutional level, Tenor as the participants taking part in the discourse and Mode as the role the discourse is expected to play in language learning, then the regulative discourse can be described as follows:

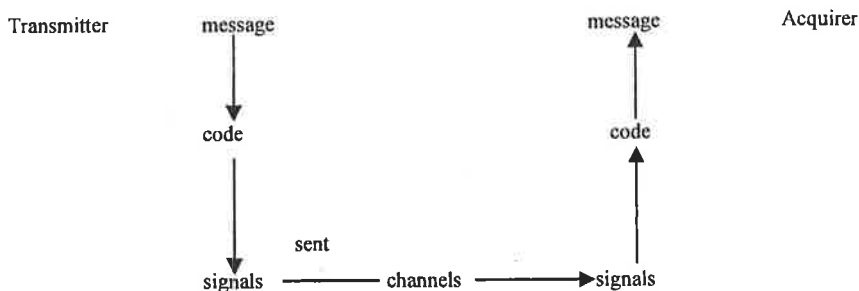
Field	:	Maintenance of the academic standards of the English language: formal, abstract, highly structured
Tenor to be	:	Transmitter and Acquirer interacting: transmitter controlling what is acquired, acquirer to assimilate what is being transmitted, formal and impersonal social relationship
Mode	:	Conduit model of communication transfer. Unidirectional flow of communication: transmitter to acquirer, lecture, oral and written instruction, subject-based transaction of facts, rules and information

Through the use of various linguistic contextual markers, the texts reveal the function and meaning of the regulative discourse in ESL learning in the school setting. The discourse of ESL instruction at the institutional level is one of maintaining the academic standards of the English language as a subject in the school. These academic standards are based on the teaching of language passed down from the earlier British system of education. This is not surprising, given the fact that Brunei had been a British protectorate for almost ninety-six years (between 1888 and 1984). Although it became independent in 1984, the value of academic English learning in the education system is still very much adhered to.

Moreover, these academic standards are set up to focus on knowledge rather than meaningful use of the language, on formal and abstract acquisition of the grammar units that make up the language, on a grasp of skills that will help learners to accomplish the fact-based and knowledge-based assessments. They also act as safeguards to prevent the “corruption” of the standard variety of English from other colloquial, non-standard varieties such as slang, for example. From the school’s viewpoint, then, the English language is seen to be a product, a commodity that can be mastered and acquired at the end of the secondary school years. It is viewed less as a process, an on-going activity, probably because of the time constraint schools are faced with to train and prepare learners to meet the outside world. Also, it would be more difficult to see the end of learning when language is acquired in experiential stages.

Because language is seen a product to be mastered, there must be participants of unequal status involved. The Tenor of the discourse is that of Transmitter and Acquirer. The transmitter would be the person who is deemed to have access to the academic language of the school. He or she would then pass it down to the acquirer who is learning the language and therefore is expected to assimilate what is being transmitted. Because the acquirer is assumed not to have access to the school language, he or she has no right to question the transmitter’s role. The transmitter is seen to be a representative of the institution and thus controls, on behalf of the institutional discourse, what is to be disseminated and how to disseminate it in the language classroom. As such, there are unequal power relations between the transmitter and the acquirer. Translated within the school setting, the transmitter would be the teacher and the acquirer the student. The social relationship between the two is reflected in the mental and material processes in Text 2, where teachers and students are perceived to have a distant and formal relationship, mainly because the teachers demand respect and good discipline from their students in order to carry out their duties. There is the belief, at least from the teacher’s viewpoint, that when teachers allow students to get too personal, these students often take advantage of the friendship and start acting disrespectfully towards their teachers.

How is this institutional discourse being transmitted? The mode of the discourse shows a conduit model of communication, similar to the following pattern:



Here, the message sent from the Transmitter may be a particular grammar rule. This rule is then signaled to the Acquirer through either the oral or written mode, or a combination of the two. The Acquirer receives the message in a similar pattern. As can be observed, messages transmitted in this way ensure that only one code is received. Thus, if the code being transmitted is a set of grammar rules, only that particular set of rules will be received, other possible sets being eliminated. Furthermore, the arrows show that communication is unidirectional, from the Transmitter to the Acquirer. This is to say that teaching the English language is a top to bottom flow of transmission, from the institutional level to the classroom level. This unidirectional flow of communication in language instruction is important from the institution's viewpoint because it is seen to be one way of ensuring that information and facts are successfully transmitted. Thus, teachers carry out formal lectures on the rules and principles of the various aspects of the language. Any interaction between the teacher and students will be in the form of transactional talk – an exchange of facts and information with the teacher controlling the conduct and structure of the transaction. One would then expect the teacher-student exchange to be short, precise and formal.

The next task, then, is to show the extent to which the regulative discourse is realized in the talk that goes on in the English language classroom. Prior to this undertaking, however, is the need to understand the functions and meanings of the features of the classroom talk within the school setting. Once again, one way to clearly describe the functions and meanings of the talk features is to employ Halliday's (1985) functional model of text/situation context. As with the analysis

of the texts at the institutional level, the texts of the language classroom oral discourse are described in terms of field, tenor and mode.

## 8.2 The functions and meanings of the ESL classroom talk features.

From Chapter 6, an analysis of the stages in the English lesson reveals three significant features of classroom talk. One is the 3-part I-R-F (Initiation-Response-Feedback) teacher-student exchange. The second feature is the teacher instructional talk employed in explaining and teaching the topic under study and the third feature is the text-based talk that is seen to permeate the entire oral discourse during the English lesson. In particular, talk is heavily based on some form of pre-determined text usually constructed or decided upon exclusively by the teacher. While Chapter 6 details the identification of significant features of talk in the English language classroom, this section is concerned with describing their functions and meanings so as to ultimately demonstrate their expression and realization of the regulative discourse.

Instances of texts pertaining to each talk feature are taken from the classroom transcript (see Appendix 13) and then subjected to various forms of textual analysis. The findings arrived at in each talk feature are based on a study of the linguistic properties in the texts such as grammar transitivity, nominalization groups and so forth. Text 5 shows an instance of the I-R-F 3-part exchange between the teacher and nominated students. Text 5 is based on a sentence written by the teacher on the board: "The teacher, with her students, is in the class." It has to be noted that this type of sentence represents the typical grammar exercise that students are given to work with in the classroom. It is highly de-contextualised, constructed for the sole purpose of getting students to identify the different elements that make up a grammatically correct sentence. It is clear that apart from this particular purpose, such a sentence would be quite meaningless and useless in terms of application beyond the classroom.

### Text 5

T	N, in the second sentence,   what is	the subject?
	senser	process: recognition phenomenon

S14 | it | is | the teacher |  
 phenomenon process:cognition answer

T |the teacher, | good |  
 answer evaluation

Key: T teacher  
 S14 nominated student  
 N name of student, first initial

With reference to the analysis above, the field of the discourse is reflected in the mental processes of cognition. The two elements here are the senser and phenomenon. The senser is N, the student respondent. The phenomenon is the thing that the student is asked to “sense”. Here, it is the subject in the sentence “the teacher with her students are in the class”. In effect, the question is: “N, what do you think the subject in this sentence is?” The student responds with what she thinks the phenomenon is: “the teacher: I think it is the teacher”, to which the teacher affirms as the correct answer: “good, I believe that is the answer too”. The field is also reflected in the identification of the phenomenon in question – the “subject” in the sentence. Thus, the field of discourse can be represented in the following way:

Field : Identification of the location of the “subject” element in the English sentence: abstract term “subject” is used to directly describe the “doer”

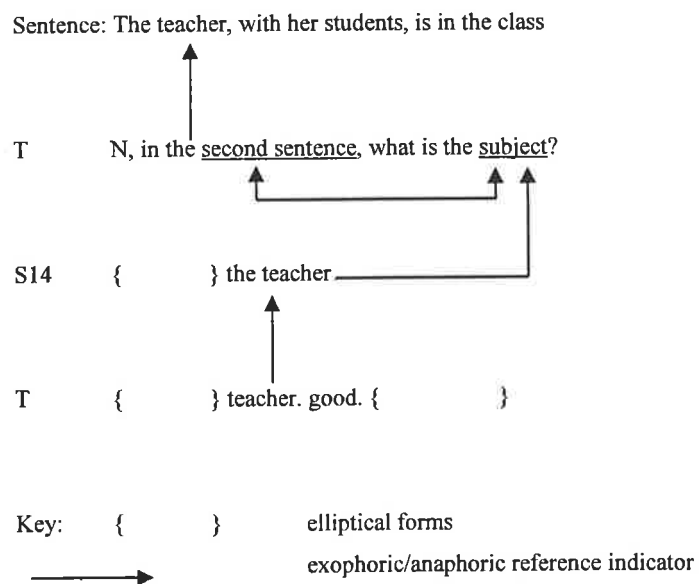
In terms of tenor, the initiation, response and evaluation structures of the text are analysed.

Text	Initiation	Response	Alternative
N, in the second sentence, what is the subject?	question		
The teacher		answer	
Teacher. Good			affirmation
	demand	give	evaluate

From the analysis, it is obvious that there are two participants - the teacher who initiates the question and the student who responds to the question asked. The teacher starts by asking a WH-question: "what is the subject"? This functions as a demand for the student to respond with a precise, short answer: "the teacher". This response functions as a give, compelled by the demand from the teacher to identify the subject. The teacher then ends the exchange with an alternative statement, which is an affirmation and therefore confirmation of the student's answer: "teacher, good". This functions as an evaluation. By looking at the function of the initiation-response-alternative structure, the text reveals a formal, impersonal and business-like relationship between the teacher and student. There is a clear demand for a specific answer, given in a precise manner and the confirmed as good and correct. Moreover, it is also the teacher who clearly controls the interaction by making the demand and evaluation moves in the exchange. Thus, the tenor can be described as follows:

Tenor : Teacher and student interacting: teacher controls the conversation by asking the initial question and providing the evaluative feedback to student's response. Social relationship is formal and business-like. Unequal conversation partners.

When it comes to the mode of the discourse, this is reflected in the elliptical forms and exophoric/ anaphoric references in the text.





From the analysis above, this text is seen to be a spoken dialogue. This is evident in the elliptical forms in S14's response: {the answer is} "the teacher" and the teacher's feedback comment: {it is} "teacher. Good" {answer}. Despite the instances of elliptical forms, the teacher and student appear to still understand each other without having to make their intentions explicit. This suggests that it is a face-to-face dialogue. Thus, when S14 responds with "the teacher", she does not need to specify: "the answer is" the teacher. The teacher knows that it is the answer. Similarly, in saying "good", the teacher does not need to specify that "the answer is" correct and good. The student knows the "good" alone indicates the correct answer. The dialogue is also grammar-based, that is it refers strictly to the sentence written on the board. This is reflected in the exophoric and anaphoric use of expressions like "second sentence" to refer to the particular sentence under discussion, and the "subject" which refers anaphorically to the subject in the "second sentence". Similarly, the student's response of "teacher" and the teacher's affirmation of it make anaphoric references to the "subject". Thus, "teacher" does not mean any random teacher but the teacher as the subject of this particular sentence. Generally, the dialogue is not seen to be spontaneous but occurs in a methodical manner revolving around a single task it sets out to do – the identification of the subject in an English sentence. So, the mode in the text can be described as:

Mode	:	Spoken dialogue: form-focused. Carried out in a methodical manner. An oral transaction of information and knowledge.
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When it comes to teacher instructional talk, a text of such an instance is subjected to a linguistic textual analysis in an attempt to provide an in-depth description of this aspect of classroom oral discourse. Here, the text under study (Text 6) is taken from part of the teacher's oral instruction in the classroom transcript (see Appendix 13:66).

**Text 6**

I said subject is very important for you to understand. Otherwise you will always go wrong here. The verb must agree with the subject. The main subject here is the teacher, not the students. So, teacher has to be highlighted and the

verb has to be supplied accordingly. Understand, it is very important. The rule does not only say “with”, but “as well as”.

Text 6 is based on the same sentence in the preceding analysis: The teacher, with her students, \_\_\_\_\_ in the class. The blank indicates the verb slot that is to be filled with the correct verb. The teacher gives instruction on which verb to be put in so that it agrees with the main subject in the sentence. It is possible to identify and describe the field of the discourse in this text by looking at its relational processes of attribution and identification and identified/identifier (Halliday, 1994:120-22). These processes are, however, made clearer when the text is rewritten without changing its original meaning:

- |    |                                       |   |   |
|----|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | It<br>identified                      | is very important for you to understand<br>process: relational                                  | subject  <br>identifier                       |
| 2. | Otherwise, you<br>carrier             | will always go<br>process: relational   | wrong here  <br>attribute                     |
| 3. | The verb<br>identified                | must agree<br>process: relational   | with the subject  <br>identifier              |
| 4. | The main subject here  <br>identified | is<br>process: relational   | the teacher, not the students  <br>identifier |
| 5. | So, teacher<br>carrier                | has to be<br>process: relational  | highlighted  <br>attribute                    |
| 6. | The verb<br>carrier                   | has to be supplied<br>process: relational   | accordingly to the subject  <br>attribute     |
| 7. | It<br>carrier                         | is<br>process: relational   | very important  <br>attribute                 |
| 8. | The rule<br>identified                | does not   only apply to the conjunction “with”, but also “as well as”  <br>process: relational | attribute                                     |

The attribution and identification of functional elements in the relational processes are marked in distinguishing terms: carrier/attribute and identified/identifier. The carrier is the entity or thing or person and the attribute is the quality attributed to it. In line 5, for example, “teacher” is the carrier and “highlighted” is the attribute

because as “teacher” is the subject in the sentence, it must be emphasized. In the case of the identified/ identifier distinction, one thing or fact or person is being used to identify another. Thus, in line 4, the “subject” in the sentence is identified by the word “teacher” (identifier) and not the student”.

By looking at the carrier and its attribute and the identified and its identifier, it is possible to say that the field of the discourse in the text is about the transmission of rules in the subject-verb agreement in English grammar: (line 1) It (in subject-verb agreement) – subject; (line 3) the verb – the subject; (line 4) the main subject here – the teacher, not the students; (line 5) teacher – highlighted; (line 6) the verb – accordingly to the subject, and so forth. In addition to this is the importance of the subject-verb agreement in the formation of grammatically correct sentences shown in the use of modals in the relational processes: (line 2) will always; (line 3) must agree; (lines 5 & 6) has to be. There is also recurrent use of grammatical terms: verb, subject, the rule. The field of the discourse can be summarized as follows:

Field : Giving instruction on the nominal rules of the subject-verb agreement of School English grammar. Emphasis on this particular point of grammar In the formation of sentences. Technical language.

The tenor of the discourse is characterized by the use of pronouns and mood elements in the text shown below:

1. || I said || subject is very important || for *you* to understand ||
2. || Otherwise *you will always go wrong here*||
3. || The verb must agree with the subject ||
4. || The main subject here is the teacher, not the students ||
5. || So, the teacher has to be highlighted ||
6. and || the verb has to be supplied accordingly ||

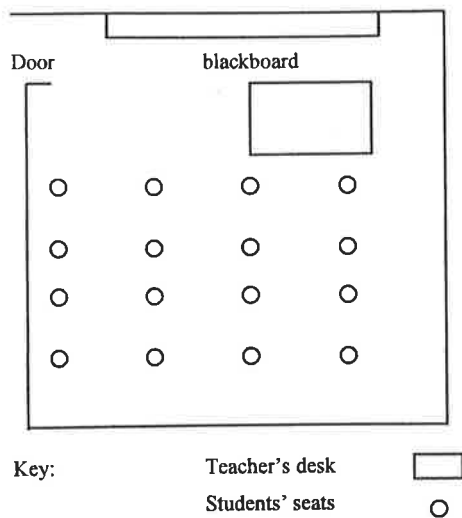
7. || understand, || it is very important ||
8. || the rule does not only say “with, but “as well as” ||

Key: ||            ||            clause            *italics*    pronoun  
 \_\_\_\_\_ mood element

The word in italics shows the pronoun used in the text while the solid underlining shows the mood element in the clause, which is indicated by two slashes. The mood element is composed of the subject and finite. Here, the finite is expressed by means of verbal operators whether through tense: subject is very important (line 1) or modals: the verb must agree with the subject. Specifically, the finite element here is used to project the interpersonal meanings in the text.

There are two participants involved. However, the text shows one to be taking the active role and the other the passive role. This is evident from the two persons: “I” as the first person in line 1 and “you” as the second person in lines 1 and 2. Here, “I” is seen to be the performer whilst “you” is the passive audience. Moreover, the exclusive use of “I” and “you” suggests that both participants are in unequal positions of authority. One is assumed to have direct authority over the other. “I said”, in line 1, suggests instruction given by a person of authority, while “for you to understand” (line 1) and “you will” (line 2) suggest someone under that authority. Thus, the “I” would be the teacher and the “you” are the students.

The exclusive use of “I” and ‘you” here to show the difference between the teacher and students in authority in terms of position and role is further demonstrated through the physical set-up of the classroom. Particularly, the classrooms in this school are commonly arranged in the traditional way shown here as:



Within the four walls of the classroom, the blackboard is placed in front and takes the whole wall space. This is the only physical teaching aid used by the teachers during instruction. Being two-dimensional, it is also the least interactive form of teaching aid, in the sense that it cannot be manipulated in a constructive manner to optimize the learner's understanding of the instruction. It provides a one-way transmission of information, from the front. The teacher's desk is also located in the front of the classroom, facing straight rows of student seating. The teacher's desk is strategically arranged in this way to deter students from interacting among themselves. From this vantage point, the teacher is also assured of students' undivided attention during instruction. The students are seated individually and separate from one another in straight rows, all facing the front of the classroom. This traditional arrangement of the classroom serves to discourage inattention and discipline problems. However, as the diagram shows, the distance between the teacher and students also seeks to emphasise the "I" and "you" barrier in communication. Being located in the front, the teacher is seen to assume the dominant position and, therefore, authority over the students facing her. More importantly, such an arrangement tends to discourage negotiation in language learning between the transmitter and the acquirer. Thus, language learning in the school, as far as the traditional classroom arrangement shows, is concerned with the transmission and assimilation of rules and principles about the English language. Negotiation in language instruction between teachers and students are not being entertained. It can be said that this pattern of classroom arrangement is

implemented to substantiate the unequal power relations between “I” as the transmitter and “you” as the acquirer.

Furthermore, the teacher appears not only to have authority over the students, but also over the topic under discussion. This is reflected in the subject and finite elements in the modality of the text. Perhaps this can be better understood by extracting the finite units in the text:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Finite</u>
subject	is
you	will
verb	must
subject	is
teacher	has to be
verb	has to be
it	is
rule	does not

By using the present tense “is” and “does not” under the Finite category, the teacher shows that her knowledge of the subject matter is factually accurate and therefore unquestionable. The use of the modals of probability “will”, “must”, “has to be” express the confidence of the teacher in the accuracy of the information she is transmitting to her passive audience, the students. Thus the tenor of the discourse can be framed as:

*Tenor: Authoritative performer to passive audience. Performer with authority (both in terms of position and specialist knowledge) to unquestioning audience. Institutionalised teacher-student relationship.*

The mode of the discourse is expressed in the thematic elements and anaphoric references:

Thematic elements in the text	Realisation
Person theme : teacher students	I you
Topic theme : unmarked items	subject, verb, rule, teacher, students, important, wrong, agree, is
Rheme : marked items	is not, highlighted, accordingly
Anaphoric references	here, it

In the person theme, the text functions as the giving of instruction from a teacher (“I”) to a student or group of students (“you”). Moreover, it is a spoken monologue, evident in the use of “here” and “it”. There is mutual knowledge between the teacher and students that “here” is an anaphoric reference to the sentence under study, while “it” refers to the topic of the lesson. Essentially, the instruction is a formal lecture, characterized by the simple grammatical structure: “otherwise you will always go wrong here”. There is also recurrent use of technical lexical material: “The verb must agree with the subject”. The theme – realized in the connectedness of the unmarked and contrastive items – is about subject-verb agreement, and the new information shown in the rheme explains that the topic is about identifying the subject in a sentence so that it will be in agreement with the verb supplied. Thus, the mode of this particular discourse is as follows:

<i>Mode</i>	<i>Spoken instruction. Formal lecture. Monologue explanation of the rules of the subject-verb agreement. Instruction constrained to the topic of the lesson.</i>
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As regards the text-based talk feature that is observed to permeate the teacher-student exchanges in the language classroom, Text 7 is taken from the classroom lesson transcript for consideration (see Appendix 13):

Text 7

T       so what will you put in the blank?  
 S5       have  
 T       have ((writes the answer in the blank in the sentence on the board)).  
           S, is it acceptable or not? No? Yes?  
 S6       No. Yes. Yes ((hesitant))  
 T       No, my question was is it acceptable or not?  
 S6       No  
 T       No. Good.

Key:   ((        ))       transcriber's description  
           T               teacher  
           S5              nominated student  
           S               first initial of student's name only, where known, for the  
 sake of  
                           anonymity

The above text follows from a sentence written on the board: "either John or Jack \_\_\_ done this." To realize the experiential meaning of the text, it is deconstructed as follows:



## Text 7

| What do you | think goes | in the blank? |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| I | think | it is the verb "have" |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| You | think | it is "have" |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| S, do you | think | "have" is correct? |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| I | think | it is wrong |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| I | think | it is correct |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| Do you | think | "have" is correct or not? |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| I | think | "have" is wrong |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

| You | think | "have" is wrong. Good |  
senser process: recognition phenomenon

When deconstructed, the pattern of the mental processes becomes clear, particularly the process of recognition, which reflects the way the senser thinks about a phenomenon. The senser is the human participant, realized here by the pronouns "I" and "you" and the person noun "S". The phenomenon is the thing or fact or idea being sensed, realized here by "the blank" and "have". The insertion of the slashes

| in the text indicates the boundaries separating the senser, process and phenomenon from one another. By looking at the senser and phenomenon, it is possible to observe what is actually going on in the language in the text. It is about two students or language learners engaged in a grammar exercise.

Specifically, it is about these learners trying to work out the correct answer to the exercise. The words “blank” and “have” refer to a sentence written out with a blank for the correct verb to be inserted. One student thinks “have” should be inserted in the blank, while another thinks “have’ would be incorrect. Through the mental processes, the field of the discourse is described thus:

*Field* :            *Students engaged in a grammar exercise, trying to fill in a blank in a sentence with the correct verb. One student provides the answer, while another is asked to assess the given answer.*

With regard to the tenor of the discourse, the pattern of questions asked and answers given provide clues to its function and meaning:

	<i>Question + “Wh”</i>
T	So what will you put in the blank?
	<i>Demand</i>

	<i>Answer</i>
S5	Have
	<i>Give</i>

	<i>Repetition</i>
T	Have
	<i>Statement</i>

	<i>question + “Wh”</i>
T	S, is it acceptable or not?
	<i>demand</i>
	<i>answer</i>
S6	No. Yes. Yes.
	<i>hesitant give</i>

	<i>question + “Wh”</i>
T	No. My question was is it acceptable or not?
	<i>clarify: demand</i>

	<i>Answer</i>
S6	No
	<i>Give</i>

	<i>Repetition</i>
T	No. Good
	<i>confirm: evaluation</i>

It is observed from the above analysis that there are three persons involved in the interaction – the teacher and two students. It is also evident, from the analysis, that all the “demands” are from the teacher and the “gives” are from the students. The

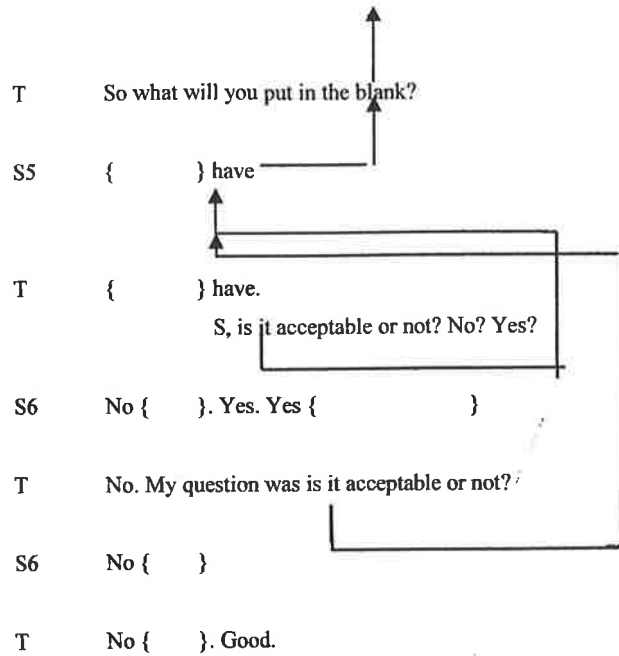
teacher demands the answer to the blank in the sentence. S5 gives it. She then demands an assessment of the answer from another student, S6. The teacher offers the final evaluative feedback. Furthermore, the functional question-answer pattern shows the teacher to be in control during the instruction: demand – statement – demand – clarify: demand – confirm: evaluation. She is seen to have considerable authority over the students.

Moreover, the ‘Wh’ question pattern and the short answers they elicit suggest that the interaction is constrained to focusing on the area of the verb at sentence level: what verb goes into the blank of a sentence for it to be grammatically correct. This is the purpose of the interaction. Thus, the language seen here is an exchange of information with an evaluative element. The tenor of the discourse is as follows:

Tenor :	<p>Teacher-student interaction. Teacher controls the interaction.</p> <p>Students provide the answers to be evaluated by the teacher. Exchange is short and context reduced to the verb formation on sentence level.</p>
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The mode of the discourse in Text 7 is reflected in the cohesive devices found in the text. Below is an analysis that serves to provide a description of the mode.

( Sentence: Either John or Jack \_\_\_\_\_ done this.)



Key    :    →      exophoric/anaphoric referencing indicator  
          {        }      elliptical forms

The arrows serve to point an item to its referent either exophorically or anaphorically, while the curly brackets indicate the elliptical forms. “Have” and “it” all refer anaphorically to the blank, which in turn refers exophorically to the sentence: Either John or Jack \_\_\_\_\_ done this. It is this sentence that forms the basis for the interaction. There are also a number of elliptical forms: {I will put} have; {no, it is not acceptable}, for example. Despite the reference and elliptical devices, the text is connected, in the sense that the participants understand one another well enough. This, however, can only happen in the immediate face-to-face interaction. In spoken discourse, such devices are commonly used without making the text incoherent, because of the contingency of transmission. Another noticeable feature is how strictly the talk orientates to one referent – the blank – and the task of inserting the correct verb in the given sentence. In terms of the kind of interaction, the text is an economical exchange of information in the form of questions and answers, with an evaluative element. Thus, the mode can be described as:

Mode :	Spoken exchange. Form-focused content. Economical exchange of information and knowledge. Strict question-answer pattern with evaluative element.
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By employing Halliday's (1985, 1994) field, tenor and mode features to analyzing texts from interviews and school documents and those actually produced in the English language classroom, it becomes easier to understand the functions and meanings of the regulative discourse at the institutional level, and the talk features in the language classroom. Such an understanding is particularly important because it provides a basis for an analysis of the extent to which the institutional discourse of language instruction is realized in the talk that goes on in the language classroom.

### 8.3 The realization of the socio-cultural structure in the ESL classroom oral practices

It is my view that one possible way to relate the classroom talk to the wider school context is by invoking the classificatory and framing concepts advocated in Bernstein (1996, 2000). To reiterate the description of these two concepts in the previous chapter, Bernstein employs both to study the orientation of classroom practices to the rules of social order in the school. In particular, he has shown how the classificatory and framing principles serve to demonstrate the distribution of power and control in institutional pedagogic practices. In his study, the classificatory principle shows the extent to which children from different home contexts recognize the distinguishing features of the school context in classroom practices. Thus, the classificatory principle has to do with recognition of rules between contexts. The framing principle, on the other hand, has to do with the realization rules, the extent to which the various features of transmission rules in the classroom, for example, relate to the transmission rules of the institution. Thus, the framing principle regulates transmission practices both within and between contexts.

Furthermore, both principles have value features attached to them. A “+C/+F” symbol indicates strong classification and framing within and between contexts, while a “-C/-F” symbol indicates weak classification and framing between them. A strong classificatory reading suggests a positive recognition by teachers and students in the classroom of the rules of social order at the institutional level, while a weak reading suggests an unclear recognition of the distinguishing features of the school. Strong framing suggests not only related realization rules among the features of talk in the language classroom, but also control at the institutional level, in the sense that classroom practices reflect strongly the transmission rules of ESL instruction at this level. Weak framing, on the other hand, shows a certain loss of control at the top. One such example would be where classroom practices are varied and do not reflect strongly the institutional rules of transmission in language teaching.

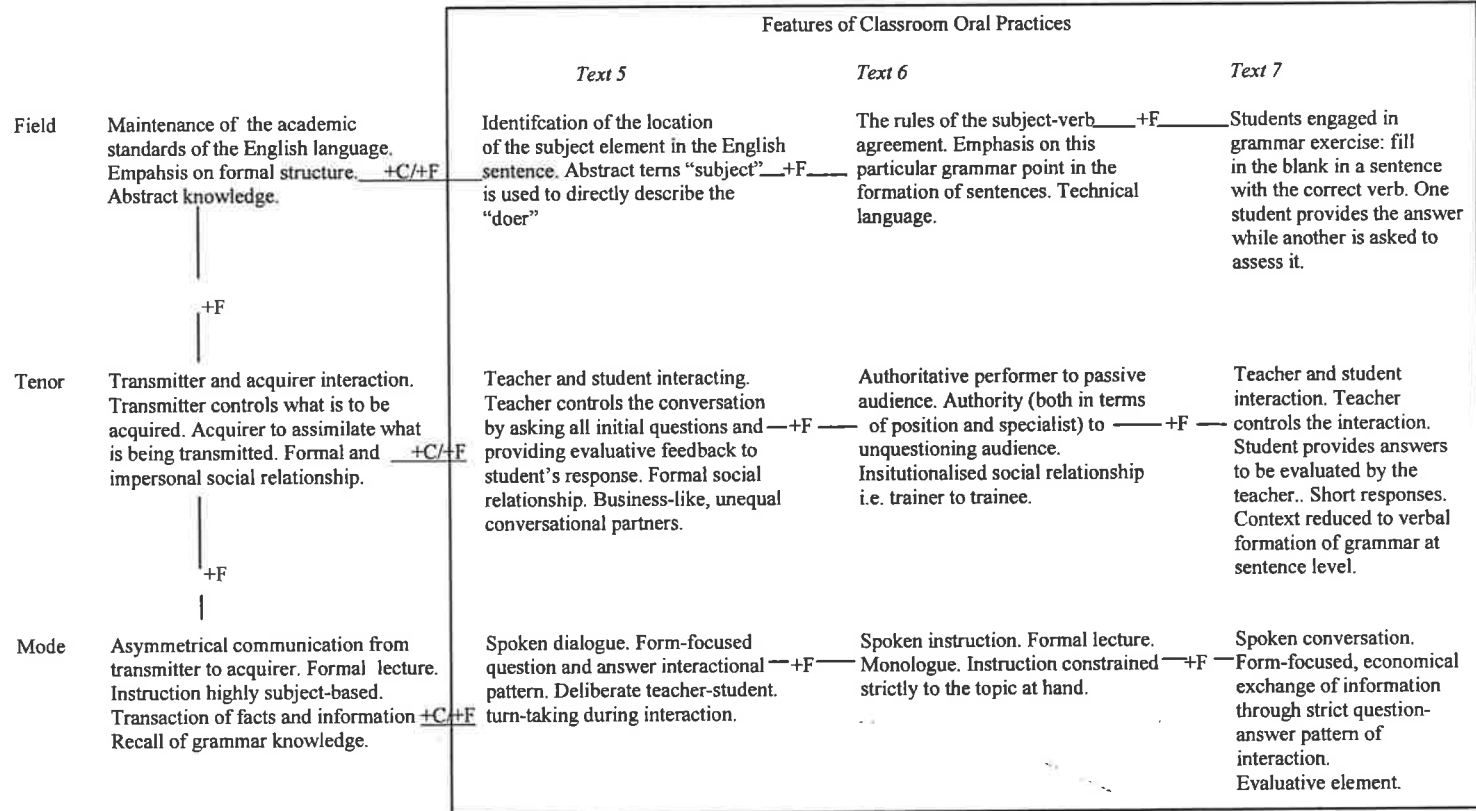
In this study, the classificatory and framing principles in Bernstein (1996, 2000) have been revised to looking at the extent to which the discourses of ESL learning between and within the school/classroom contexts act to inform and be informed by each other. Both contexts are located within the school setting. In particular, it is a classification and framing of two discourses. One is the regulative discourse that sets the social and cultural rules of ESL learning in the school. The other is the realization of these rules in the features of talk in the English language classroom. Following from the analyses of the texts in the previous sections of this chapter, a framework is set up, as shown in Fig. 8.1, which provides the basis for examining the relationship between the regulative discourse, at the institutional level, and the classroom talk during the English language lesson.

The larger frame in Fig. 8.1 represents the overall context of ESL learning in the school, in which the regulative discourse resides. The smaller frame embedded within it represents the classroom context, where significant features of the classroom oral discourse identified in Chapter 6 is found. These features are expressed through texts, the transcripts of talk that actually occurred during the English lesson. Thus, Text 5 is an instance of the I-R-F feature of classroom talk, Text 6, the instructional talk and Text 7, the text-based talk. The sum of Texts 1 to 4 contain instances of the four elements of the socio-cultural structure identified in

Chapter 5, taken from the interview transcripts from the principal, English language teachers and students and school documents such as the teacher's record books and assessment papers.

Furthermore, structure and practice are each described in terms of field, tenor and mode. The field refers to what is going on with the language in the texts. The tenor has to do with the participants and their social relationship to one another and the mode refers to the role the language plays, such as that of the channel of communication. Through the framework of Fig. 8.1, the relationship between the structure and practice in ESL school learning is clearly demonstrated. Specifically, the school context is seen to embed the classroom context without dominating it. This is because of the mutual and reciprocal realisation of the socio-cultural structure, within this larger context (expressed in terms of the regulative discourse), in the actual talk patterns in the classroom context. More than this is the strong classificatory and framing value indicators (represented by the +C/+F symbols) found to be operating between structure and practice, values that reveal the positive orientation of classroom talk patterns to the features of the socio-cultural structure and, therefore, the strength of the structure/practice relationship between the two contexts.

Socio-cultural Structure in ESL instruction



Key : +C strong classification  
 +F strong framing

Fig. 8.1 A framework of the relationship between the socio-cultural structure and language classroom oral practices



In Fig. 8.1, the fields of discourse in Text 5, 6 and 7 all show that language classroom talk revolves around the explicit instruction of grammar. In this case, it is the subject-verb agreement. Moreover, the emphasis appears to be less about grammar use and more about the formation of a particular grammar point, from the identification of sentence elements: “N, in the second sentence, what is the subject”? (Text 5), to giving the rules of the topic: “the verb must agree with the subject “(Text 6), to engaging students in a grammar exercise: “so, what will you put in the blank”? (Text 7). The whole approach to the language is highly academic, with the recurrent use of abstract terms such as “subject”, “verb” and “agree”. In a significant way, grammar instruction is central to maintaining the academic standards in language learning in the school context. Language learning in the school is not so much about achieving the aesthetic appreciation of the language, nor its practical use. It is about academic performance, that is, the acquisition of the formal structure and abstract aspects of language knowledge. More importantly, it is about the what, not the why and how of language use. In this particular school culture, a grasp of the grammar, particularly its formation in words and sentences is very important from its academic viewpoint. Thus, the focus on explicit grammar teaching in the classroom reflects strongly the view of language learning in the wider school context.

Added to this is the strong recognition of the academic rules in English teaching and learning by the teacher and students. Both parties, in their interaction with each other, appear to understand what is expected of them during the question-answer sessions and oral instruction, despite their abstract and formal nature. In no instance did the students question the need to learn the grammar, nor the teacher the need to teach it, probably because both have come to expect that grammar instruction is central to the learning of the English language in the school. Thus, not only is there strong framing within the context of the texts produced in the classroom talk, there is also strong classification between the classroom oral practices and the structure of ESL instruction (+F/+C).

There is also strong framing in terms of the tenor in all three texts. All exhibited the presence of two groups of participants – the teacher and the students. In Text 5 and 7, there are instances of direct teacher-student interaction. Although Text 6

shows one active participant, the teacher, giving instruction, there is nevertheless an audience, albeit a passive one, to which the instruction is directed. Moreover, the teacher appears to be in control at all times. She initiates all questions and provides evaluative feedback in all the exchange encounters: “N, in the second sentence, what is the subject?” ... “the teacher. Good” (Text 5); “so, what will you put in the blank?” ... “no. Good” (Text 7), and shows specialist knowledge in the topic: “I said subject is very important for you to understand ... the main subject here is the ‘teacher’, not the ‘students’” (Text 6). As a result, the relationship is very much that of assessor and assessed, instructor and learner, with very little personal element. All three texts are strongly orientated towards the tenor expressed in the regulative discourse. In order to disseminate the academic standards in language learning, there must be someone with access to the knowledge of the components that make up the English language in order to transmit the rules and principles to the learner. Thus, the teacher functions as the transmitter with the aim of conveying these rules and principles to the students, who are expected to assimilate what is being transmitted. For transmission to be successful, there are roles assigned to the teacher and students to foster a formal and impersonal relationship. In school, maintaining this kind of relationship is important because it ensures successful transmission from the top of the academic ladder to the bottom. Thus, there is the strong framing between the structure of ESL instruction and the actual texts of classroom talk in terms of tenor.

In addition, the texts show that the teacher and students have accepted their roles and the existing social relationship between them without much difficulty. There is not a single instance, in my observation, of students questioning the teacher, nor challenging her authority in the classroom. In accepting the unequal relationship, the teacher and students demonstrate knowledge of the recognition rules with regard to the transmitter-acquirer relationship in the school setting. So, there is not only strong framing between structure and practice, but strong classification between them as well.

All three texts of classroom talk are also framed strongly in terms of mode of discourse. Although it is obvious that the texts are in the spoken mode, given that they represent the talk features, it is the characteristics of the spoken language that

are worth noting. Text 5 is spoken dialogue between the teacher and an individual student, Text 6 is teacher instruction and Text 7 is a three-way teacher-student conversation. All three texts are form-focused, in the sense that they revolve around the subject and verb units of sentences. The dialogue and conversation sessions are strictly transactional language, in the form of question-answer-evaluation turn taking. The teacher's questions direct the length and kind of expected student responses. In Text 6, the instruction resembles a formal academic lecture with the teacher giving a monological performance on the rules of the subject-verb agreement in English sentences. The mode in all three texts reflects the unidirectional communication from the top of the academic ladder to the bottom. As is shown by the mode of the socio-cultural structure, language instruction is accomplished through a strict one-way communication flow from transmitter to acquirer. Instruction takes the form of formal lectures and question and answer exchanges either orally or in written form, or both. The instruction is also based on the exchange of facts, information or knowledge about various abstracted aspects of the language structure.

Clearly, as far as the socio-cultural structure in school ESL instruction is concerned, language learning is not spontaneous, nor an autonomous activity. Furthermore, the one-way channel of communication at the institutional level appears to be recognized by the teacher and students in the classroom. In the spoken teacher instruction in Text 6, this unidirectional communication is put into practice. Here, the teacher's monologue on the "subject", "verb" and "agreement" rules appear to be a routine and accepted occurrence in classroom talk. Certainly, the students' non-interference throughout the rather lengthy teacher instruction does not seem strange or foreign within the classroom setting. Thus, it can be said that both the teacher and students have recognized, or have been socialized into recognizing, the unidirectional communication rules at the institutional level in the school. There is thus both strong framing and classification between the two contexts as shown by the symbols +C/+F in Fig. 8.1.

Following from Fig. 8.1, classroom oral practices show a strong orientation towards the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction at the institutional level.

Moreover, the strength of the structure/practice relationship can be summarized as:

$$\frac{\text{COP} + \text{F}}{\text{SS} + \text{C}/+\text{F}}$$

COP refers to Classroom Oral Practices. The  $\frac{\text{COP} + \text{F}}{\text{SS} + \text{C}/+\text{F}}$  symbolizes the embedding of the COP in the Socio-cultural Structure (SS), and the symbols +C/+F indicate the classification and framing values. Here, the significant features of classroom oral practices show strong framing among themselves. These practices are seen to be orientated towards, and therefore embedded within, the institutional socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction. In addition, the structure is also positively realized in the classroom talk features. This is evident in the strong classification and framing values (+C/+F) shown both within and between the two shown in Fig. 8.1. What this means is that there is a mutual link between the socio-cultural structure of school ESL instruction and the language classroom oral practices, in terms of transmission and recognition rules, a finding which will be further discussed in the next section.

#### 8.4 Discussion of findings

By describing and analysing the structural features of ESL school learning and classroom oral discourse in terms of field, tenor and mode, it has been possible to discover the connection between structure and practice in the L2 learning in the school, and therefore the existence of a structure behind the teaching and learning of the English language in the school. More significantly, the manner in which the functions and meanings of the actual talk features in the classroom are shown to explicitly relate to the socio-cultural structure demonstrates that the perceived socio-cultural structure has now become realized as the operant structure in ESL school learning. If the socio-cultural structure is described, as that found in Zimmerman and Boden (1993) in Chapter 7, to be the domain where organized, regular, recurrent and non-random events operate in a systematic and orderly relationship to one another, then the framework of Fig. 8.1 provides a sound

discussion of how the socio-cultural structure is located and realized in the three main features of classroom talk.

As far as the structure of ESL formal instruction is concerned in terms of the field of institutional discourse, language learning is about attaining and maintaining the academic standards of the school. These academic standards are largely those handed down by the British system of education where focus is on knowledge of the structural aspects of the language, such as its grammar rules, the morphology of words and the construction of grammatically correct sentences. In particular, language learning in the school setting is viewed as an object, something that can be dismantled into neat and de-contextualised parts, dispatched in an abstracted and prescriptive manner and then graded in objective terms. In important ways, this view of language is reflected in the transactional talk that goes on in the classroom.

Language learning within the school setting is also about the acquisition of specific skills, mostly those that will help students perform in written assessments testing their knowledge about the English language. It can be said that these skills are largely academic, in the sense that they are seen to be of particular value in the classroom. But as Kramsch (1998) points out, it is questionable whether the possession of such skills is adequate or sufficient for students to use the language proficiently beyond the classroom context. The linguistic skills required in the workplace, for example, may be quite different, and it is important to be aware of the distinction. Thus, the skills learnt in the classroom, within an educational setting, will be orientated towards this particular socio-cultural structure, which is quite different from that of a computer laboratory, for example. The school, however, is also a ground for preparing learners to cope in society. Based on this important link between the school and society, it is expected that what is learnt in school is relevant, to some degree, to society's needs and demands. Skills learnt in the school, must therefore, be capable of being applied to the workplace, for example, when students leave it to make their living in the outside world.

Academic standards are also about mastery of the school sanctioned standard variety of the English language. Thus, within the school setting, efforts are

constantly being made to promote this variety as the language of the educated speaker. Slang and colloquial language use are discouraged and are projected as the language of the uneducated. The prestige bestowed upon the standard variety supports arguments put forward by writers of education through the years (Rosen, 1967; Barnes, 1972; Woods & Dias, 1997; Bernstein, 1999) that schools promote a particular linguistic code which is conferred a higher status than other codes. In this study, this preferred, or sanctioned, linguistic code is evident during the teacher's oral instruction in the classroom. Certainly, in the classroom observations carried out, there is no single instance of students and teachers interacting in colloquial English, although this variety is common among students themselves.

It is also clear that in school language learning, emphasis is placed on mastering the grammar of English. This aspect of the academic standards set out in the school is realized in the analyses carried out on the classroom talk texts. Here, it is found that the interaction revolves around particular grammar points, where the routine and regular form of transmission occurs in formal three-part teacher-student interaction patterns and recurrent abstract instructional monologues. In the classroom, the grammar is frequently talked about and instructed on, but rarely used in meaningful and productive ways. Instead, de-contextualised, meaningless sentences are used as bases for talking about verbs, nouns, adjectives and so forth. Students are required to work at fill-in-the-blank types exercises but not at the grammar beyond the sentence level in contextualised situations. What is found is that in the classroom, it is more important that students achieve the grammar to acquire academic writing skills, for instance, and to pass the assessments and exams. In this way, the classroom oral practices are seen to orientate towards maintaining the academic standards set out at the institutional level.

Furthermore, it appears that structural knowledge is more significant for the teacher than students. The unconscious and consistent use of metalanguage terms exclusively by the teacher not only puts a stamp of approval on structural acquisition in second language (L2) learning, but more importantly substantiates the importance of such acquisition within the overall structure of school ESL learning. Contrary to the findings of Donato and Brooks (1994), there is no

instance of students engaged in metatalk. So, while a considerable amount of effort is expended on gaining structural knowledge, it is not clear whether students are able to use this knowledge to communicative effect.

That there is a difference between knowing the forms of a language and using that knowledge in communication was already being pointed out in the 1970s (Halliday, 1975) and has more recently been addressed by Doughty (1998) and Long (2000). Certainly, the teachers in this study have pointed out that while students have little trouble doing grammar exercises, they still do not know how to apply all the grammar that they have learnt in contextualised situations. This supports the argument that language learning without a context is meaningless (Halliday, 1985, 1994).

However, the setting where language learning occurs must also be taken into account (Breen, 2001; Bruner, 1996). The justification for the emphasis on form from the institutional viewpoint needs to be noted. In the school context, English functions as a subject to be learnt and assessed. So, attention paid to structural forms provides some kind of tangible evidence that learning is taking place in a way in which meaning acquisition cannot. This objective view of language learning is reflected in the recurrent features of transactional and highly instructive patterns of talk in the classroom.

It is also found that within the structure of ESL learning in the school, one way to maintain these academic standards is to have a transmitter, someone who has access to the standard variety and knowledge of its grammar rules and principles, to transmit these language rules and principles to the acquirer. In order for transmission to be successful, the relationship between transmitter and acquirer must be an institutionalized one – that is a formal and impersonal relationship of unequal power of authority. In a way, it is a relationship similar to that of an instructor and a trainee in the acquisition of knowledge about a particular product or commodity. In addition, transmission rules of ESL learning are transmitted as a unidirectional flow of communication from transmitter to acquirer. Thus, the goals and objectives of language learning is largely pre-determined, with students having no say in what to learn and how to achieve what they want to learn. In

particular, this unidirectional flow in communication ensures the control of transmission rules at the institutional level. Moreover, it serves to discourage negotiation in what is to be taught and learnt concerning the English language subject in the school. This kind of communication also generates student passiveness and non-interactive classrooms.

This hierarchical nature of the structure of authority in the school is clearly reflected in the way the teacher and students relate to one another in the classroom. Here, the teacher is found to wield considerable control over topic and conduct of classroom talk. In the IRF exchange, for example, the teacher's right to make initial and feedback moves shows that she holds control over what should be talked about and also how the talk is to be carried out. Certainly, the unresponsive behaviour on the part of the students seeks to further confirm the unquestioning authority of the teacher in the classroom. On the videotape, students are seen to be passively listening to what the teacher says, making very few verbal responsive gestures. It is difficult to decipher the level of student intake at this stage of instruction. The teacher seems to be the key participant in the interaction, and, although this may seem artificial and awkward in other circumstances, it appears to be the unmarked observation in the classroom.

Similarly, by setting up a set of grammar exercises, the teacher can be seen to direct classroom interaction to certain pre-determined teaching goals. In a roundabout way, the format of the exercises serves to further define the position between the teacher and students. Here, the teacher is cast into the role of the examiner while students become examinees. As the examiner, the teacher is in a position to evaluate and assess the students' responses, thus highlighting the unequal status of the two in the classroom. This unequal status may have negative repercussions for students in the overall language development, as opportunities for them to use the target language from this position are greatly reduced.

Furthermore, the teacher's authority on subject knowledge is obvious during instruction. It reveals the superiority of the teacher over the students in subject or topic knowledge. In expanding on the rules and evaluating the answers provided



by the students based on a structured set of exercises, the teacher shows that her role is that of transmitter of knowledge, as Harmer (1995) has pointed out.

While the findings certainly conform to arguments put forward by studies elsewhere that the IRF pattern of interaction helps the teacher exert social control over the students (Cazden, 1988:53) and that she therefore may see any kind of students initiation as a threat to her (McDevitt, 1997), it is less certain whether this authority is one brought about by the teacher herself. Certainly, the impression gained from the interviews with the teachers is that the teacher and not the students should know what is best for them in language learning:

I mean I don't see any way that students will have to have a say in what they learn. Ours is clearly geared to their needs (T1).

It is good to sometimes, you know, get them (students) to suggest, but I think, the final say has still to come from the teacher. So that there's more order and there's a system going on (T2).

I don't think it (student-centred classroom) should be allowed ... and I don't think a child is in a position at any age, for that matter, even the F4 and F5 (upper secondary levels). I don't think it can be student-centred (T3).

Some readings, however, suggest it might not be the case that the authority comes primarily from teachers. More and more, conclusions from studies on education have indicated that the teacher's authority is conferred upon him or her by the wider school context (Hotho, 1998; Van Lier, 1997), a feature so firmly established by the institution that sometimes even the teacher finds it difficult to break out from this (Hadden, 2000). Throughout the research period in this study, there is no instance of teachers making explicit their expectations of students' behaviour, for example, yet it is there all the time, especially in the classroom. The teacher's authority is unquestioned against the backdrop of the social structure of the school context. Because it has been part of the system for years and years, the teacher's authority has become an established feature in the classroom (Manke,

1997; Furahata, 1999). It is also evident, from the classroom observations, that the teacher-student relationship in the school is one that is evolved through years of socialization. This socialization process operates to inculcate students into a position of submission in the classroom, and thus of passivity. This particular transmitter/acquirer relationship in the school ESL setting is not impulsively brought about, but one that is institutionalized.

Because the relationship between teachers and students in the school setting is an institutionalized one, there is the mutual acceptance by both teachers and students of the fact that deference must be paid to the teacher in the classroom if learning is to take place successfully (Holliday, 1994). Students have routinely come to accept that in the classroom (and the observations in this study certainly shows this to be true), they do not take initiative over their learning. One reason may be they could not take the initiative even if they wanted to. The other reason may be due to the fact that they have been socialized into thinking that, in the classroom, it is not their place to initiate any aspect of their language learning. They do not at any point question the teacher's instruction or the content of the lesson. In fact, during their interviews, they pointed out that they would leave their English teacher to organise the what, and how, of their language learning in deference to her experience and qualifications.

The methodical and recurrent patterns of classroom talk and the consistent and institutionalized teacher-student relationship both acts to reflect and realize the socio-cultural structure in school ESL instruction. What is significant about this connection between structure and practice is that the classroom talk has not shown to be orientated towards one, or two, or even three of the elements of the structure, but the structure as a whole. This is an important observation because it dispels the misconceptions projected in current L2 classroom studies that one key element may be responsible for the non-interactive behaviour of students in the ESL classroom.

The classificatory and framing values applied to the structure/practice relationship reveal that not only is the classroom talk orientated towards the structure of institutional ESL pedagogic discourse, but also that it is orientated strongly

towards it, both in terms of transmission rules and recognition rules. What this means is that the control over the rules for transmission of the English language is seen to rest almost entirely at the institutional level, in the sense that there is very little deviation of these rules exhibited at classroom level. Moreover, both the teacher and students show that they recognize the social rules of ESL learning the school. In the language classroom, for example, there is no single instance, from the observations made, of the teacher and students negotiating over who has authority in the classroom. Nor do students question the apparent meaningless grammar exercises and assignments they are obliged to do. This is probably because they do recognize the importance of grammar learning and the teacher's authority within the school context. The strong classification and framing between the two contexts within the school setting highlights not only that a positive relationship, but also the strength of that relationship.

Certainly, from the framework of Fig. 8.1, this kind of relationship serves to embed the classroom oral practices within the socio-cultural structure. This imposition of the structure of language learning in the school on the language classroom oral practices gives impetus and credence to studies that allude to the existence and impact of the wider social and cultural structure on the practices in a particular context and setting (Lantolf, 2000; Van Lier, 1997; Cortazzi, 1990).

The findings also show strong recognition rules, in the sense that the teacher and students are seen to work together to realise the pedagogic rules of ESL instruction at the institutional level. It seems that this collaboration is only possible because both parties see classroom talk not as something useless or worthless as perceived by some ESL studies (Tsui, 1985; Baetens Beardsmore, 1995) but relevant to the way the English language is taught and learnt in the school.

The strong classification and framing values between the two contexts – the school and classroom – reveals an equally important discovery as far as the structure/practice relationship is concerned. Although one is seen to embed the other, it is not dominant over the other since both structure and practice are seen to relate to each other in a mutual and reciprocal manner. While the classroom oral

practices are orientated to the socio-cultural structure, it also acts to maintain and sustain the latter. Conversely, while the structure is shown to influence the oral practices in the classroom, it also requires the collaboration of the participants in such practices to further establish and preserve it. This point will be discussed in greater detail in the next, and final, chapter in this study.

### Summary

From Halliday's (1985, 1994) field, tenor and mode model to analyzing the texts produced from the interview and classroom transcripts and relevant school documents, it has been possible to construct a framework that shows the relationship of the discourses between the school/classroom contexts. From this framework, the realization of the socio-cultural structure of ESL school instruction in the ESL classroom interaction has been clearly demonstrated. By further applying Bernstein's (1996, 2000) classificatory and framing values, it is found that the socio-cultural structure in ESL learning within the school does positively impact and influence the oral practices at classroom level. The strong classificatory and framing values, however, shows that while the structure operates to embed the language classroom, it does not dominate it. Instead, both are seen to feed off each other in a mutual and reciprocal manner through the collaboration of the oral practices in the ESL classroom, a collaboration made possible because teachers and students perceive the patterns of talk to be relevant in the overall school structure in ESL learning.

## Chapter 9

### Final Discussion And Conclusion

#### 9.0 Introduction

From the very beginning in Chapter 1, there is the suggestion that the ESL classroom is not an isolated context, but is linked to the wider educational setting of which it is an integral part. The familiar patterns of classroom communication, in particular the talk that goes on in the second language classroom, documented across current research literature all indicate the existence of a particular socio-cultural structure in ESL instruction at institutional level. Such an idea has taken on greater shape and credibility with more studies concerning the influence of the social structure behind talk and conversations in other contexts (Zimmerman & Boden, 1993). Certainly, references have alluded to the impact of the particular structure on the nature of education in schools (Bernstein, 2000; Christie, 2000; Oakes, 1986).

Given the important indications about the relationship between structure and practice in school ESL learning, it is thought that, while studies have been carried out in ESL education at the classroom level, the wider school context has been to a large extent ignored or given scant attention. Indeed, studies that focus on classroom interaction have been well documented and have provided invaluable insights into classroom social practices. However, studies on how these social practices contribute to and are influenced by the wider school culture of ESL instruction have not been forthcoming. In other words, while a lot has been written about the ESL classroom, less is known about classroom practices as they operate within the overall school structure.

There has been a gradual awareness of the significance of a socio-cultural, what Van Lier (2001:245) calls an 'ecological' perspective, on classroom communication (Lantolf, 2001; Gebhard, 1999; McDermott, 1996; Harklau, 1994). By locating the language classroom within the ecology of the wider school,

its practices are an integral part of the overall school practice of ESL teaching and learning. In many ways, this “ecological” perspective can be paralleled to the socio-cultural theory of SLA. Van Lier (2001:245) equates both perspectives to looking at language use as representing the cultural, historical and social norms of a particular environment through the practices of its various parts. Up until recently, there have been passing references to a socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school, but these have been too obscure and implicit to warrant much attention. And yet, there is a growing realization that a socio-cultural perspective offers important insights into ESL teaching and learning.

It is this gap that provides the rationale for this study. What it has attempted to do is to subject the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school to an explicit analytical study. A reference to the definition of “structure’ in Chapters 1 and 2 shows that it is not a compact and compartmentalized organization of factors or features that determines the outcomes of learning but is rather one conceptualized from the values and beliefs of the members of the school community about ESL education. As such, this “structure’ is not a visible phenomenon but contains the members’ perceptions about language learning. It becomes clear that one possible way to highlight its visibility and, therefore, existence would be to locate it in observable behaviour such as, in this case, the talk that goes on in the language classroom. Based on three guiding research questions, an ethno-methodological study employing qualitative data collection and analyses has been carried out.

The first part of this chapter contains a discursive review of the findings pertaining to the research questions set out. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the study. The third part looks at directions for future research resulting from this study. The conclusion section forms the final part of the chapter.

### 9.1 A review of the research questions

The purpose of the study is based on three main research questions:

- (i) What are the socio-cultural elements that make up the structure of formal ESL instruction in the school?
- (ii) What are the significant features of classroom talk during the English language class?
- (iii) To what extent is the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction expressed and realized in the features of classroom talk?

9.1.1 The main elements of the perceived socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction

Because the concept of a socio-cultural structure does not lend itself to overt observations but is expressed through the individuals within a particular community, the findings have come from analyses of transcripts of interviews with the school administrators, teachers and students. These are further supported by other sources of data collection such as classroom observations, field notes, documents and video tapings. From the findings gathered, the socio-cultural structure is perceived to be composed of four main elements in ESL instruction in the school: (i) structural competence, (ii) assessment, (iii) authority and (iv) skills acquisition. These do not appear to occur in any logical or progressive order of sequence, but work together in interrelated fashion to form the non-written and non-visible rules governing the teaching and learning of the English subject in the school. In a very significant way, they are perceived to be the abiding social rules of school language learning.

One element of the socio-cultural structure is the structural competence. The idea behind the promotion of structural competence in ESL instruction is to break up the language into neatly defined concrete parts such as grammar and vocabulary. The teachers' weekly lesson notes are divided into teaching language forms - grammar topics, vocabulary expressions and summary writing. In their record books, teachers have been instructed to teach towards improving their students' English grammar, spelling and punctuation. Thus, successful language learning has been equated with the ability to reproduce all the abstract language forms in the exams. Essentially, what this leads to is that firstly, it places recognition and emphasis on language knowledge rather than language use and meaning. From the

school's viewpoint, it is not so important for students to use the language, but more important that they know the language. Secondly, by deliberately breaking up the language and then disseminating it in abstract technical parts, the language taught in the classroom bears remote resemblance to what it actually is as a natural discourse.

The second element of the structure is the assessment. This supports arguments put forward by Cheng (1996:9) that the exam "is the soul of the ethos about education in East Asian societies". One reason for this is the popular belief among these societies that exams act as effective gatekeepers to the maintenance of what is considered to be the "standard" and therefore correct language. In Singapore, for example, the assessment is used exclusively to show the learner's degree of mastery over what is called "standard" English, reflected by the number of years of formal schooling.

In this study, the significance of assessment is evident in interviews and conversations held with the school administrators, teachers and students. In an interview with the principal, it becomes obvious that assessment is an important factor in school learning. Parents demand it. Students want it. They want to obtain a certificate at the end of the school year. In the school, students are assessed four times a year and are expected to pass the required tests and exams to enter the next level. Moreover, a study of the end-of-year papers shows them to be very content and grammar oriented. Students are tested on their ability to regurgitate information and facts transmitted by their teachers and their ability to write in grammatically correct sentences. Assessment papers frequently contain random items testing students' knowledge of the different technical aspects of English such as verbs, adjectives, relative pronouns and so forth. Practice in language use has not been emphasized and is hardly assessed during the school year. Instead, students' proficiency is measured against written performance and, the number of 'correct' answers produced.

During the interviews, however, both teachers and students express ambivalent feelings towards the exams. The teachers feel they are being pressured into producing good results so that the school can maintain a good reputation.



Teachers want students to participate more in the classroom. They want to get away from chalk and talk teaching. This desire is evident when two of the three teachers interviewed claim that they have a communicative teaching style, even though actual classroom observations have not shown much evidence of this. It appears that the demand for exam results by the school system has made it very difficult for teachers to change their teaching methods. Students meanwhile think that the exams and assessments are meaningless because they may still not speak well, even though they are able to score distinctions in their English papers.

However much they detest it, students feel that assessment is important for instrumental reasons such as getting good grades to enter tertiary education or to cope with studies overseas. Teachers consider assessments and exams to be important yardsticks for measuring students' linguistic knowledge, and teachers do need to know the standard of their students' language proficiency in order to proceed to the next level of instruction. According to the administrators, assessment is a necessary requirement, something no school can do without. Much as students dislike it, they want it and their parents demand to see results from their children's learning.

It would appear that the complaint is not about the assessment itself, but the format, content and evaluative aspects of the assessment instruments being employed. However, as is pointed out by one of the teachers, the course of the English language is vast and limitless. From the school's viewpoint, therefore, the most efficient way to evaluate students' learning of the subject is to harness the language into measurable units for easy and objective grading and testing.

It is obvious that in school, the motivation for learning the language is more extrinsic than intrinsic. It is extrinsic in the sense that the language is learnt for passing exams, getting a good job and to promote one's status in society. For many students who learn the language, it is not for personal achievement or a love for the language, but more for the economic benefits it offers. This has been clearly demonstrated in studies in other Asian societies such as Japan and Hong Kong (Benson, 1991; Furahata, 1999; Wu, 1991).

Perceived to be operating within the socio-cultural tradition of the school is a hierarchical organization of authority in L2 teaching and learning, which constitutes the third element of the instructional structure. From interviews and conversations with the different group members in the school, there appear to be three levels of authority. At the top of the academic ladder are the principal, deputy principal and assistant principal, who preside over the school administration. Their main duty is concerned with achieving the educational objectives and goals of the overall L2 instruction. Immediately below them are the teachers, who are expected to carry out these objectives and goals in the classroom. As such, the teachers preside over classroom learning. And at the bottom of this ladder are the students who receive whatever learning has been given to them. Moreover, each group has tacit knowledge of its roles, expectations and power of authority in relation to the other groups. So, while teachers are expected to submit to the authority of the school administrators, in the classroom, students are expected to submit to the authority of the teacher.

As a result, a large power distance (Cotterall, 1999:67) is created whereby unequal power relationships exist among all three groups. The roles at each level are clearly defined with very little overlap in functions. Thus, it is not surprising that there is a wide and deep divide between students and administrators. Although students are under the authority of the school administrators, direct encounters between the two are infrequent, making the administrators' position inaccessible and remote as far as the students are concerned.

However, this hierarchical level of authority is important from the school's viewpoint if it is to function effectively as a learning institution. Students have been socialized through years of schooling to respect their teachers and understand that challenging the teacher's authority in the classroom is socially unacceptable. During informal conversations, students sometimes express their frustration over the way lessons and classroom have been managed but state they would never confront or question the teacher because, according to one student, they have to face her everyday. Students realise that, in order to be part of the school community, it is important to inculcate a harmonious relationship with teachers. While the hierarchical nature of authority may be good for maintaining

the school establishment, it may be less helpful in providing an active and spontaneous language learning environment. This is because students are cast into passive roles with limited opportunities to develop their language learning.

Teachers hold contradictory views on the subject of authority. From their interviews and conversations, all three teachers appear to be struggling with what they want and what they actually do. All, for example, say that their objective in teaching English is to produce students who can communicate fluently and confidently in the language. When asked for their opinion of an ideal English language classroom, they all say it would be a class where students are interactive and have more say in their learning. Yet, at the same time, they do not approve of the idea of student-centred learning because they feel that students do not know what they want. More importantly, they feel that it is not the students' place to dictate what to learn or how or when. Perhaps, after years of unconscious assimilation of the authority conferred on them by the school, it has become more difficult to relinquish some of that control.

Here, authority has also been conferred on a particular linguistic register or code of the language. The impression given is that students can only be considered to be truly 'educated' if they are able to acquire the ability to produce the formal, correct school language. Thus, slang or other colloquial uses of the language are considered to be 'incorrect' English usage as far as the school is concerned. When students are asked during their group interviews about the language they are learning in the school, all three groups claim that it is very different from language used outside the school and the classroom. Even while they are aware of the difference, all believe that what they learn in school will help them when they leave, so the language learning experience in school is not without usefulness. This contradicts in a way the argument that school language is disconnected with that used in the real world (Corbette & Blum, 1993). In a significant sense, students have been socialized into the idea that only one form of language should be acquired well if they wish to better themselves in society, and that is the language of the school.

The fourth perceived element in ESL instruction in the school is the acquisition of language skills. The impression gained from all the various interviews and supporting field notes and documents is that language learning is expressed in terms of skills acquisition. Four main language skills appear to be taught in the classroom – writing, reading, speaking and listening skills. However, it also appears that these skills are viewed as separate and discrete rather than integrative. Thus, in the teacher's lesson notes, for example, activities and lessons are planned to promote some skills and not the others. Thus, when a lesson is recorded as 'reading comprehension', only the reading skills will be emphasized. So, students will be taught how to read for information and interpretation. Rarely are there learning activities that incorporate an integration of all four language skills simultaneously.

Furthermore, it is found that far more attention has been paid to some skills rather than others. Teachers appear to be particularly concerned about promoting writing and reading skills; not much is said about speaking and listening skills. Perhaps this is not unexpected, since in Brynes (1998) it has been argued that school discourse has traditionally been about written text-based knowledge. More specific is the emphasis on writing and reading competence in the final G.C.E. "O" Level exams. The English language papers are composed of Paper 1 (Composition), Paper 2 (Reading Comprehension) and Paper 3 (Oral). There is no listening component. Papers 1 and 2 are written papers and Paper 3 is in the spoken mode. The relative weighting of the 3 papers is: Paper 1: 42%; paper 2 : 42%; paper 3 : 16%. Given that this is the case, it makes sense that teachers pay a lot more attention to teaching writing and reading skills than oral and listening skills.

A significant observation from the overall findings is that through the operating socio-cultural structure, the natural discourse of English has been redefined, relocated and recontextualised to accommodate the educational setting, reminiscent of Bernstein's (2000) argument of the decontextualising principle of educational practices and Kramsch's (in Brynes, 1998) distinction between academic discourse and natural discourse. Thus, English as a subject in the school is seen to be taught and learnt against the backdrop of the four governing elements

of structural competence, assessment, authority and skills acquisition. Together, these make up the socio-cultural structure in ESL instruction in the school. It is perhaps this transformation of English as an untaught natural language to English as a taught subject in the school that has resulted in criticisms about the usefulness of the language learnt in school in the real world.

From the analytical interpretations carried out, a number of observations become clear. It is found that the socio-cultural structure is largely a perceived one, meaning that it is an invisible organizing concept, and therefore, not open to analysis. Thus, as a phenomenon within the context of ESL learning, its impact in the classroom cannot be expended upon in any great detail because it is basically still a perceived concept. For it to make any coherent sense, it is necessary to look for it in the social practices in the language classroom, which in this case, are the patterns of classroom talk between the teacher and students.

#### 9.1.2 The features of classroom talk

From a focused study of a 35-minute English lesson in the upper secondary classroom, it is found that classroom talk is composed of three main features – (i) the I-R-F (Initiation-Response-Feedback) exchange between the teacher and students, (ii) the distinct instructional talk employed by the teacher during the transmission of information and (iii) the pervasive exercise-based talk that occurs throughout the lesson.

The findings indicate a particular IRF pattern of teacher-student interaction to be an unmarked feature of classroom talk. The pattern is illustrated as: teacher initiation – student response – teacher feedback. Most initiations are in the form of questions and the whole conversation resembles a series of interrogative question-answer sessions.

Two main observations can be discussed here. One observation is that the IRF pattern is not random, rambling or spontaneous. It is deliberate and purposeful. The focus on a single message, the systematic allocation of alternate participant turns and its repetitive nature all indicate that it is a device efficiently employed

by the teacher to serve a wider purpose within the overall instructional goals, and that is to help students acquire as much academic knowledge about the language as possible. The fact that it keeps on recurring in a similar pattern shows that the I-R-F exchange is bound to a wider context, very similar to patterns in other kinds of talk in other contexts such as a doctor-patient conversation or a case hearing between the judge and the lawyer in a courtroom (Zimmerman & Boden, 1993).

Another observation made, especially from a structural-functional perspective, is that the IRF exchange sequence does not generate expansion of talk, especially from the students. Moreover, it is found that the questions asked by the teacher act to confine students to making short, concise responses. Yet, the teacher does not show much concern that there is minimal talk coming from the students, since she is interested in hearing the answers to her questions. This brings to mind Widdowson's (1990) distinction between language-learning activity and language-using activity. According to him, there is a time and place for each type of activity. It appears that in the classroom, the former rings true. And judging from the naturalness of the situation, the IRF feature certainly seems to be a classroom practice that the learners are used to.

The second feature in classroom talk is a distinct type of instructional talk adopted by the teacher in the communication of information and knowledge. It is delivered in very formal, academic language not very different from academic writing with no occurrence of casual or colloquial language use. In addition, the teacher's instructional talk is found to contain three significant characteristics. First, there is the pervasive use of metalinguistic expressions. In this case, the teacher's instruction is heavily peppered with grammar terms such as 'nouns', 'verbs' 'tenses' and so forth. The oral transmission of rules governing the use of the particular grammar topic is delivered in highly abstracted form. It appears that this metatalk that teachers engage in is an unmarked feature in other SLA studies as well (Donato & Brooks, 1994; Nunan, 1997). Nunan (1997) describes this kind of talk as form-focused instruction and proposes that it does play a useful role in getting students to understand the structural aspects of the language. Donato and Brooks (1994) suggest that metatalk in the L2 classroom is only meaningful if students are seen to be engaged in using it during class discussions. In this

instance, there is little evidence of metatalk on the students' part. They have not been asked to discuss what they know about 'verbs' or 'tenses', for example. So the metatalk is largely one-sided and that from the teacher. So, in terms of meaningful language acquisition, it seems doubtful that students will actually understand the message behind all that metatalk the teacher employs in her instruction.

The third characteristic of teacher talk is the strong wash-back effect of teacher instruction. Frequent references to the assessment- both implicit and explicit - are made by the teacher during the course of instruction. To this effect, students are made very aware that the reason behind all this instruction is the written composition paper of the forthcoming exams. What makes the instruction important is that mistakes made in the grammar of students' essays can result in marks being deducted from their overall score. One way in which teachers help students avoid making mistakes in the exam is to adopt a formal one-way transmission of the rules of the grammar.

It is questionable, however, if students actually understand what the teacher is talking about. Certainly, there is a lot of listening going on, but less evidence of comprehension given the fact that there are so few opportunities for students to question or clarify their doubts during instruction. However, observations show that perhaps this aspect has never been considered, because the monologic, formal nature of instructional talk is largely an unconscious teaching practice in the language classroom. The teacher does not expect to be interrupted nor questioned. It seems that the socialization process is at work here. Bourdieu and Passeron (1996) suggest that teachers are restricted to such talk by the presiding institutional expectations and goals. After years of being in the role of instructor and mentor, the formal monologic and exam-oriented oral instruction is seen to be a natural way for teachers to communicate their knowledge. In this way, students are socialized into contributing the minimum during classroom instruction. Student passiveness in the classroom is well documented in ESL studies (Tsui, 1985; McLellan & Cath, 1995; Gonzalez, 1994).

Findings also show that classroom talk is heavily based on written texts. The interaction throughout the lesson is focused on two similar written exercises constructed by the teacher. These are grammar exercises involving a number of random sentences, each with a blank where the verb is located. The idea is to get students to supply the correct verb in each sentence. It, therefore, is not surprising that the teacher-student conversations do not deviate from the exercises.

The exercise-based talk acts to prevent language use that falls outside the scope of the texts. For one thing, the exercises are focused on one particular grammar point. Second, the whole grammar point is dealt with at sentence level. This limits quite drastically the scope of talk in terms of content and usage. The content is biased towards achievement of structural knowledge, while usage is confined to repetitive oral drills of sentences that have been constructed for such a purpose. English as a subject in the school is viewed as an object where mastery is measured in terms of acquisition of its discrete parts rather than the ability to use the language as a whole. But then, according to Kramsch (1998), academic discourse has always favoured the written as opposed to the oral word. This is probably because schools find the standard written code far easier to manage than the messier, more unpredictable oral code. Indeed, teachers feel more confident and secure when instruction is based on written texts where they do not have to deal with the nasty surprises that come with oral texts. However, with the current trend towards computer language, it would be interesting to see how schools cope with e-mail texts, for example.

Finally, it can be said that these three features form the main elements behind classroom talk. Moreover, they interweave in a natural and efficient way to form the oral discourse in the language classroom.

To re-capitulate, the analyses show that there is (i) an established and well-defined socio-cultural structure perceived to be operating in the school and (ii) that classroom talk consists of three main features that together form the classroom oral practices. The task now is to address the particular purpose of this study, namely the third research question, namely the extent to which the socio-cultural elements of ESL school instruction are expressed in classroom talk.



### 9.1.3 The socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in classroom talk

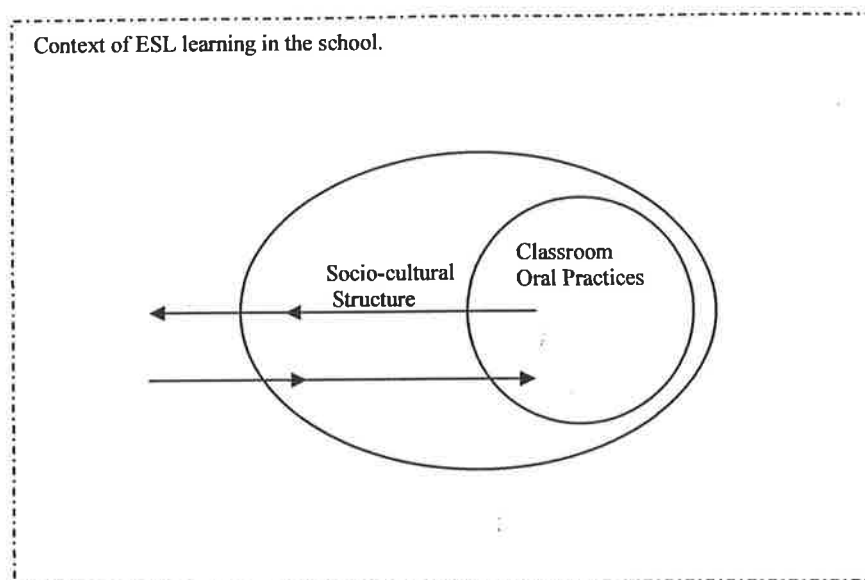
The identification and description of the perceived socio-cultural structure and the actual talk features of the language classroom provides the setting for examining the third, and final, research question, namely the extent of the structure/practice relationship. Specifically, it is about the realisation of the socio-cultural structure in classroom talk. For such an examination to be possible, the identification and description of the perceived socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction and classroom oral practices must be expanded to include a detailed study of their functions and meanings within the school setting.

By using Halliday's (1985, 1994) field, tenor and mode model of text analysis and Bernstein's (1996, 2000) classificatory and framing values, it becomes possible to conceptualise the structure/practice relationship within a contextual framework shown in Fig. 8.1 in the preceding chapter. This framework shows how the functions and meanings between the perceived socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school relates to and is realised by the talk patterns in the language classroom within it. This mutual and reciprocal relationship between structure and practice seeks to convert what has so far been a perceived socio-cultural structure in school ESL learning into an operant structure. What this means is that the structure has now become an explicit and visible phenomenon in school ESL learning.

Perhaps the final discussion pertaining to this final research question can be more clearly and coherently dealt with through a diagram, one derived from the argument suggested in the preceding chapter, presented here in Fig. 9.1.

The rectangular frame represents the social context of ESL instruction in the school. The dotted nature of the frame shows the fluidity and variability of the school context, with factors that are constantly interacting with the consensual and sometimes opposing beliefs and values concerning ESL education held by those within (principals, teachers and students) and outside (society, ministry of education, parents, educationists) the school community. The flexibility of this context also suggests that it is not universal and not therefore applicable to all

situations. The context of ESL instruction in a school in Brunei may not be the same, and therefore not applicable to that in, say, Thailand, Vietnam or China.



*Fig. 9.1 The expression of the socio-cultural structure of formal ESL instruction in classroom talk*

Within this context lies the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction, and embedded within the structure is classroom context, where the oral practices of the English class occur. The relationship between the structure of ESL instruction and classroom practices is such that the practices strongly orientates towards the structure and lends it an explicit identity. Classroom oral practices are thus embedded within the socio-cultural structure in similar ways to that shown in other contexts. Wilson (1993) shows how the courtroom talk between the judge and the lawyer orientates towards the social structure of the courts. ten Have (1993) in his study of doctor-patient talk shows how the conversation orientates towards the social structure of the clinic or hospital.

Fig. 9.1 yields a number of important observations. The embedding of the socio-cultural structure within a variable and flexible context shows that it may be but one possible factor, among others, that influences classroom language learning in the school. This discovery helps to bring up the misconceptions drawn from language classroom studies (Tsui, 1985; Wu, 1991; Cheng, 1996; Doughty, 1998),

that there may be one key factor responsible for influencing the behaviour of teachers and students in the classroom.

The embedding of the practice within the structure, however, does not mean that one is dominant over the other because both discourses act to inform, interact and influence each other, as shown by the interacting arrows in Fig. 9.1. This may seem like a contradiction of findings in Chapter 8 which shows the strong classificatory and framing values between the two. But it is not. The strong and positive orientation of the classroom oral practices to the structure both in terms of recognition and transmission rules yields two discoveries about the structure/practice relationship. One is that power and control of the social rules of English as a subject in the school is seen to rest in the wider school context, where the structure resides. The other discovery is that the structure of ESL learning is shown to be highly dependent on the classroom oral practices for its sustenance and maintenance. Assessment as an element of the socio-cultural structure, for example, influences the way teachers carry out instruction in the language classroom. The sustained conduct of the particular patterns of the teacher's instructional talk also enables the structure to be maintained. There is thus a mutual and reciprocal relationship between the two discourses and therefore between classroom practices and the structure of ESL instruction in the school. Any decision by teachers and students not to collaborate with the structure or actions seen to contradict the structure can immediately put it under pressure and therefore threaten its very existence.

An interesting question that follows from these findings is the extent to which this recontextualised discourse of the English language is beneficial to L2 learning in the classroom. On the one hand, there is the argument that L2 learning is not about benefits or even success, but relevance on the other hand. There is the argument that the school is a context with a specific purpose, and that is to educate (Garner, 2001; Breen, 2000; Taylor, 1994; Widdowson, 1990). In order to be effective in what it sets out to do, there must be collaboration between structure and practice. Thus, if English has to be manipulated and recontextualised into English as a subject prescribed for success in school learning, then it is justifiable and functional within that context. The main point here is that there is a time and place

for learning a language and using it. In the school, the recontextualised language may be more appropriate given the constraints and limitations of such a setting (Furahata, 1999; Own, 1990; Richards, Tung & Ng, 1992). Unfortunately, it is questionable whether students are aware of, let alone understand this distinction. From the relationship between the socio-cultural structure and classroom oral practices, it is found that students do recognise the structure of ESL instruction in the school. However, recognition of the school rules of transmission is not the same thing as understanding them. If the socio-cultural structure is not made explicit and transparent enough, the language learning experience in school for most students will probably be a grope in the dark with no light visible at the end of the tunnel. As was strongly argued by Van Lier (in Byrnes, 1998) "coconstruction" (p164), that is the collaboration between teachers and students in learning is important, as it enables students to be involved in their learning and the direction in which their learning will lead.

It is however the case that the school system and its language instruction, both of first and second languages, has come under heavy criticism (Verma, 1989; Wallace & McCoy, 1992; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1996; Bernstein in Candlin & Mercer, 2001). It may be that there is a mismatch between structure and practice. The school or institutional system can so dominate the behaviour of its teachers and students that they are trapped within it and its deficiencies and limitations, or it may be that there is a mutual relationship between a defunct structure and therefore deficient practice. Indeed, in both cases, it is not difficult to see that an asymmetrical structure of communication exists both in school and the classroom, a feature attributed in part by the overall socio-cultural structure. Moreover, this structure appears to be well-maintained and established, perhaps because of what Vanderstraaten (2001:385) calls the "intentional socialisation" of teachers and students, reflected in the deeply-ingrained social practices in the language classroom. His use of "intentional" here suggests that the socialization process of teacher and students have been deliberately indoctrinated into the structure of language learning in the school with the sole purpose of establishing and maintaining the system of the institution.

The findings from this study serve to both support and contradict these arguments in various ways. Indeed, what has been highlighted here is that the English language education in the Bruneian context in particular, and in similar ESL societies elsewhere, is about monopolization and commodification. It is monopolization in the sense that standard British English is the dominant language of instruction and learning in schools, with other varieties of the language being marginalised. This may have to do with the historical background of the English language in countries which have a colonial past shared with a native English speaking country such as Britain, for example. Brunei was a British protectorate since 1888 and did not gain independence until 1984. There is thus still a high regard for standard British English as the model for acquisition. It is this standard English that society demands from its educated population, and schools aspire to produce standard British English speakers through their language instruction system. Other varieties, including the variety of local accents found in Brunei English or the more popular informal Singapore English, are viewed as unacceptable and are not catered for in the school system.

Associated with this first form of monopolization are the asymmetrical power relations between the teacher as instructors and students as learners. Because teachers assume greater access to Standard English, they are seen to monopolise oral interaction in the classroom. Thus, overt markers of unequal power and authority are found in the three-part exchange. These come in the form of initiation of topics, asking questions and use of specialised vocabulary inaccessible to students.

The other revelation that the findings have highlighted is the commodification of the English language. Perhaps, this is most clearly demonstrated by the regulative discourse at the institutional level. Here, a transformation process is seen taking place where English as a natural discourse is recontextualised and “repackaged” as a lucrative and attractive programme of study in the school. This programme is the product of language learning in school and includes within it a discourse dominated by word and sentence “knowledge”, the training of specific skills such as written academic skills and performance in exams and assessments. It is ultimately a programme that seeks to “give the customers what they want”

(Fairclough, 1999) who in this case are the parents, learners and society at large. It is also a programme that serves to further maintain and establish the goals and objectives of the institution.

It can be easily seen how monopolisation and commodification in school language learning may not help in the overall language development of the learner. If one objective is to improve the oral aspect of language learning, as is evident from the background to the study in Chapter 1, then there must be an effort to include, recognise and at least, accept the local variety of English in schools. If teachers and students can interact in a variety that they are comfortable and conversant with, it will definitely go a long way to developing the speaking skills. Learners are more willing to participate if they could talk in a language that is status free. Inclusion of a local variety in the overall language programme is also useful because it may help learners to see the differences between formal and informal English and to appreciate each in its own right. What is more, commodification tends to discourage unpredictability and creativity in language learning. If there is a desire to promote divergent learning in schools ( as there now is in Singapore), including in language learning, then there must be some degree of flexibility and tolerance of what is acceptable and unacceptable in school instruction.

Schools have very specific purposes, and so it is only to be expected that nothing should be left to chance. This study has shown that among other considerations, the whole idea behind the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school is to transform the English language into a language for instruction and then socialize teachers and students into its particularized practices in the language classroom. The socialization of the classroom practices in turn acts to perpetuate the structure. This is an effective way to realize the educational aims and goals of the school. Despite this, however, schools will continue to be the target of criticism. My explanation for this fact comes from the viewpoint that the school is in a unique position in a sense that it straddles two opposing contexts - the traditional context of an educational institution and the progressive context of society at large. Thus, while it is expected to train and educate learners in the target language, it is also expected to prepare learners to use what they have learnt with a degree of confidence when they meet the outside world. From the

foregoing discussion, we see quite clearly that in the school, language learning is not about promoting language use or even meaning, rather, it is about 'instrumentalism' (Heslep, 2001:191), a tool for getting students to fulfil the goals of the L2 learning within the wider educational context. The interests of the students or even those of the teachers in language teaching and learning must therefore be compromised.

## 9.2 Implications of the study

This study has implications for ESL education. By making explicit the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school, the study has attempted to create a better understanding of the relationship between classroom language and the socio-cultural structure of its wider educational context. In essence, the study has provided insights into why teachers and students behave as they do in the classroom. In particular, it has helped to significantly make sense of classroom teacher-student oral behaviour.

It has provided another perspective on looking at classroom language learning - the socio-cultural perspective. From this angle, it is possible to bring about a broader focus on the language classroom as it exists within the larger school community. Despite the inherent limitations and constraints of such studies, it does produce opportunities to look at naturally occurring behaviour of the school organization, thus reframing some traditional thinking about interactive behaviour in the ESL classroom.

In an indirect way, the study has helped in suggesting directions for redressing the deficiencies and problems that abound in ESL classroom learning (Widdowson, 1987; Bailey & Nunan, 1997; Browne, 1998; Doughty, 1998). I say in an indirect way because the study is not intended to provide a simple solution to the problem, for example, change the socio-cultural structure and the problems disappear. This would be naïve and too simplistic, because of the complex nature of the socio-cultural structure itself, a fact that has been discussed throughout this study. The principles and rules that constitute this structure are not derived objectively but are evolved from the traditional social, historical and cultural beliefs and values of

people who are directly and indirectly involved in ESL education. Some, like teachers, are also involved directly in the practices of the structure. So, it is quite clear that changes in the actual classroom practices must go hand in hand with changes in the socio-cultural structure.

Because of the tight and close connections between the two, it would not be possible to change one and not the other and still hope for some measure of success. There is little point in trying to change the IRF exchange sequence, for example, if nothing is done to simultaneously change the motivating principle behind the practice. Neither would it be beneficial to change one aspect of the socio-cultural structure and ignore the other aspects, knowing by now how the different elements are linked to one another in important ways. A half-hearted attempt at change will not yield the results desired.

This study also suggests that, when the wider context of school language learning is taken into consideration, there may be an infinitely large number of factors that can influence, and impact, what actually goes on in the classroom. Moreover, the contextual relationship between structure and practice demonstrated in this study shows that there cannot be one key influencing factor, but a collaboration of related elements within the school culture, that informs and is informed by classroom practices.

One implication brought about by the study is that it has highlighted the acute difficulty encountered in attempts to change ESL classroom learning. This is because an attempt to change the classroom practices is also seen as an attempt to change the system of ESL instruction, something that the school might be reluctant, or powerless, to do. There would be the initial resistance, but changes at this level take time and perseverance for them to be accepted and perfected within the school culture. This study has demonstrated that the preservation of the present socio-cultural structure has been made possible only through years of socialising teachers and students into accepting the social rules of ESL learning within the school and then incorporating its tenets as part of routine classroom practices. And so, it will require the same considerations if the structure is to be changed or modified in any way.



By adopting a socio-cultural perspective to looking at the issues in the ESL classroom, the study has created an integrative approach to language classroom studies. In particular, it has shown the possibility of expanding the analytical framework to include contextual studies carried out in the fields of anthropology, sociology and linguistics. An integrative approach has also helped to draw the actual participants in the teaching and learning process into reflecting on issues beyond the classroom. In a significant way, it seeks to make it easier for practitioners like teachers and researchers to understand the fundamental theoretical concepts of linguistics and their contributions to actual practice.

Finally, the study proposes that there is no such thing as a universal language classroom or even school. Thus, classrooms and schools do not all have identical characteristics, nor are they organized in the same way. Every classroom in every school or educational setting is unique, and the structure of language instruction in one educational institution differs in degree from that in another. Moreover, not all classroom practices orientate towards a socio-cultural structure of the school in the same way.

### 9.3 Directions for further research

This has been an exploratory study and offers at best preliminary results with very little attempt made to mask its inherent and inevitable limitations. It has confined itself to looking at the issue from a detailed focus on one school in an ESL context and one English lesson in its upper secondary classroom. It has been an examination of naturally occurring behaviour in a specific context, and has addressed the guiding research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

It is also evident that the socio-cultural structure initiated in this study has not been fully exploited nor explored. This is because a detailed exploration into every aspect of the context of ESL learning in the school setting would not have been possible within the scope of one study. The socio-cultural structure in formal ESL learning, however, provides important directions for future research along similar planes of thought. Although a focused study on the English syllabus document is not within the scope of this particular study, the findings suggests for

an inclusion of the socio-cultural climate of the school into any such study, simply because such a perspective provides for the attachment of social values and beliefs to the syllabus in its execution in the language classroom.

The study has unveiled observations that could generate further research in this field. One significant observation concerns non-verbal language classroom behaviour and its relationship with the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction. During classroom observations, there have been numerous instances of silence on the part of the students during instruction. A study of class tests and assessments also shows students repeatedly failing the English subject. Are these signs of inability to cope with the L2 learning or are they acts of defiance by students against the whole structure of ESL instruction?

Another observation that warrants attention is the relationship between the physical organization of the school, such as its staff organizational structure and classroom arrangement, and the socio-cultural structure in ESL school learning. While a focus study of this relationship would have been beyond the scope of this study, it nevertheless promises to be an interesting and insightful topic for future research.

Also significant is the tension felt in the expressed and desired attitudes towards ESL instruction during the interviews, particularly from the teachers. From the interview transcripts, there are a number of contradictions between what teachers claim they do and what they actually do in the classroom. A worthwhile issue to take up here would be to find out what teachers really want from the language teaching experience. Certainly, the findings can go a long way to help align structure with practice as far as language learning in general, and L2 learning in particular, is concerned.

### **Conclusion**

From the outset, the intention of this study has been to provide an explicit and analytical scrutiny of the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school context. In a significant way, it has achieved what it has set out to do. Based on an

ethno-methodological approach, it has sought to address the following three appropriate and pertinent research questions in a logical and progressive argument:

- (i) What are the socio-cultural elements that make up the structure of ESL instruction at the secondary school level?
- (ii) What are the significant features of classroom talk during the English language class?
- (iii) To what extent is the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction expressed and realized in the features of classroom talk?

Thus, it first identifies the features of the socio-cultural the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in the school. Specifically, and this is shown throughout the study, that because the features of the structure are ascertained from the perceptions held about ESL school learning by the administrators, teachers and students, the socio-cultural structure is found to be a perceived phenomenon, which by itself, may not be open to a rigorous explicit study. The study then goes on to identify the three main features of classroom talk before finally demonstrating how the socio-cultural structure is expressed and realized in classroom oral behaviour. In particular, although the structure of ESL instruction is shown as not openly reflected in visible behaviour, it has been possible to demonstrate its influence on ESL formal instruction through the relationship of the two discourses it embeds.

The exploration of the socio-cultural structure in ESL formal school instruction in this study has yielded a number of observations about language education in general, and formal SLA in particular. First, it highlights the lack of research focus on the macro/micro relationship within the school setting in current language classroom studies. The argument expressed through the analyses carried out and the discussion of findings show that while there may be no shortage of studies on the macro or micro issues, there is little emphasis on the relationship between the two. What this means is that while classrooms and schools have been studied separately, an explicit, analytical focus on the school/classroom

relationship in terms of language learning has not been forthcoming. Certainly, this study demonstrates that if any sense is to be made of the behaviour of teachers and students in the classroom, focus of study cannot be restricted to units of analysis on the classroom or the school as independent entities, but must include the relationship between them.

By expanding the classroom language learning to include the wider school context, it is found that there are specific social and cultural values attached to ESL learning at the institutional level, values which serve as rules for the social practices of teachers and students in the classroom. It is discovered that language learning in school is product, rather than process, based. Thus, acquisition is measured in terms of abstracted knowledge of its grammar vocabulary, sentence structure and so forth, rather than through trial and error and discovery learning. To a significant extent, ESL learning in the school is less about using and applying the language in meaningful ways, but more about its abstracted properties, such the particular grammar rules. This particular ideology behind language learning in the school helps to explain the perplexity commonly expressed in current studies about the low level of student participation in the ESL classroom.

The study has also demonstrated that an understanding of the socio-cultural structure of ESL instruction in a particular institutional setting can provide useful directions in taking steps to address the problems of school ESL learning. Contrary to suggestions projected in current research studies, it puts forward the argument that there is no one particular factor that influences classroom learning, but that it is the structure as a whole that impacts what goes on in the language classroom. The mere changing of one feature, such as assessment for example, may not yield the appropriate or desired results. Effective changes can only take place if an effort is made to investigate the structure of the pedagogic discourse of the target language as a subject at the institutional level. Based on this structure, realistic changes and modifications can then be made to improve the language learning situation. Furthermore, although this has been a study on the ESL classroom, a similar kind of investigation can be applied to learning across the curriculum, such as that of Maths, or Science or History, for example. The study

can also be applied to language classrooms elsewhere in the world, be it a first, second or foreign language situation.

The second conclusion drawn from this study is demonstrated in the relationship shown to exist between structure and practice. Particularly, it defies the traditional notion of “structure” as an independent construct or phenomenon with specific pre-determined conditions attached to it. Here, the structure is seen to evolve from the current and flexible social and cultural conditions within a particular community. More importantly, its existence and sustenance lies in it being positively expressed or realized in the workings of its parts. Thus, within the school context, the structure of ESL instruction may be, both the cause and effect of, the language learning that goes on within it.

Thirdly, the findings show that language learning is more than about completing a set of syllabus guidelines initiated by the curriculum department in the Ministry of Education. The identification of the socio-cultural structure demonstrates that attached to the syllabus are social and cultural beliefs held by members within and beyond the school setting, beliefs that do impact on the way the language is being taught and learnt in that particular context. The syllabus may indicate, for example, that the present tense of English grammar should be taught at the secondary school level. How this particular grammar topic is to be transmitted in the classroom is linked closely to the values and beliefs held by the administrators, teachers and even members of the school board about formal language education. This is an important observation, particularly when it comes to making changes to an existing programme of study or when implementing one. An exclusive examination of the syllabus, without taking into account the way it is being taught and learnt in a particular institutional context may not be a useful, or even meaningful, exercise. The inclusion of the socio-cultural structure of ESL learning provides an added dimension that can lead to more efficient changes and modifications being made.

The fourth conclusion arrived at is that the methodology to data collection and analysis adopted in this study deviate from that found in traditional language education research work. Instead, it integrates within its methodological

framework similar work done in other related fields of social sciences and humanities, such as linguistics, sociology and anthropology. The argument is that, for a robust and rigorous study, such integration is necessary. Here, the analyses carried out and findings arrived at have incorporated contextual studies carried out in areas of sociolinguistics and sociology. Certainly, the integrative approach to looking at the kind of relationship that exist between the school and classroom contexts shows that no chasm exists between language education and these other disciplines. Instead, language education is seen to be significantly linked to sociology, anthropology and linguistics, and that any research work undertaken in language education should include these other works for better comprehension and an in-depth understanding of the institutional issues involved.

This is not to say, however, that the socio-cultural structure in formal ESL instruction has been fully exploited and thoroughly investigated. This study has shown that, realistically, it would be almost impossible to capture everything of importance in an investigation of this nature within one thesis. As an initial foray into the socio-cultural dimension in formal ESL learning, however, the study has demonstrated that a structure does exist, and that it has potential for unraveling the complexity of the behaviour of teachers and students in the language classroom. As such, it has opened the door to future research along a similar dimension. This study has sought to link the structure of institutional discourse to classroom oral practices. It has not focused on how the structure relates to or is related by the non-verbal behaviours in classroom learning. Furthermore, it has but skimmed over the relationship between the socio-cultural structure of language learning and the physical constructs of the school, such as the organizational structure of staff and students, the classroom arrangement, the obligatory wearing of uniforms by students and so forth. These are important issues in language education that should be taken up in future research investigations.

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## APPENDIX 1

### LETTER TO THE SCHOOL FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH WORK

**Centre for European Studies and General Linguistics**

**South Australia 5005, AUSTRALIA**

The Principal

Mr Jacob Chin

St. Andrew's School,

B.S.B. Brunei

Fax number 673-2-234708

Dear Sir

This is a letter to confirm that Ms Guan Eng Ho is a postgraduate student in the Discipline of Linguistics at Adelaide University. She is enrolled in the Master of Arts Research award. Her research requires collection of information on the teaching of English in schools.

Since Ms Guan Eng Ho has joined our postgraduate class in Applied Linguistics we have come to appreciate her scholarship and expertise. Her research is dealing with significant issues in the teaching of English, and I anticipate that it will provide us with practical insights into teaching English.

I commend her very highly to you and hope that you will approve of her collecting information in classes in your school. Please contact me if you would like more information.

Yours sincerely

Peter Mickan PhD

Convenor Discipline of Linguistics

Centre for European Studies and General Linguistics

University of Adelaide, South Australia 5005

Email: peter.mickan@adelaide.edu.au

Tel 08 8303 5638 Fax 08 83035241



## APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEWS

### Suggested topics for interview : the principal (P)

1. There have been observations that changes are taking place in language classrooms elsewhere like in Singapore and Hongkong, for example. What do you see as possible areas for development in the teaching and learning of English in the school?
2. We hear a lot about 'good' and 'bad' language classes. What in your experience is a 'good' English class?
3. It is assumed that most schools have certain expectations concerning teachers and students. What do you expect from your teachers and students when it comes to learning English?
4. I have been here for some weeks now and have made many interesting observations around the school. Some of these observations are particularly significant. Would you like to comment on them?
5. It has been suggested that principals do play an important role in the school. What in your view are the roles of a principal?
6. Would you like to make any final comments about the English language teaching and learning in this school or even about this research itself?
7. A recent article in Borneo Bulletin pointed out the growing importance of the English language. Certainly, English is given considerable importance in Brunei. What, in your opinion, is the status of English in this school?
8. Have you observed any English classes? What impressions did you gain from these observations?
9. I have read the exam and assessment papers that have been set. What role/s do you think exams and assessments play in the language programme?

Suggested topics for interviews : the English language teachers (T)

1. Tell me more about your teaching experience. Has it influenced your teaching in any way?  
How has it influenced your teaching?
2. I see that the students are assessed a number of times during the school year. Can you comment on the exams and assessments? Tell me, what role/s do you think the exams and assessments play in language learning?
3. Tell me, what's it like teaching English at this level? (What do you mean...? Can you say a little more...?)
4. How would you describe your teaching style?
5. As a teacher, planning what and how to teach a class is part of what you do on an everyday basis. When you write your lesson plans, what do you think about? (Your main consideration is...? Tell me more...?)
6. You have taught for a number of years. From your experience, what do you think works well for you as an English teacher?
7. Tell me about your teacher training. What have you used from it?
8. What in your view is a well-run English classroom?
9. Quite a lot has been written about the ESL classroom being dominated by teacher talk and that students are generally passive. What do you say to that?

Suggested topics for interviews : student groups (SG)

1. Do you enjoy your English lessons? Why?
2. What do you like most about your English lesson? What do you dislike most? Why?
3. Do you think the facilities e.g. the library, language lab, resource centre in the school are good enough to help you with learning English?
4. Do you prefer to learn in a bigger class of say about 30 students or a smaller class of say 15 students? Why?
5. What do you think about the exam/assessment English papers? Do you think that exams will really help you improve your English? In what ways are they helpful/not helpful?
6. Do you like the textbooks/materials you're using now? Why? If you were given a choice, what would you take out or include in your textbooks?
7. Do you think there are too few English lessons in a week or are you happy with the timetable?
8. Do you think students should participate actively during English lessons? Why?
9. Why do you think some students do not want to respond or participate in class?
10. Do you like teachers who let you work on your own e.g. finding answers through group discussions? Why?
11. What kind of teachers would you like to have in your English class?
12. Do you think the English you learn in school will help you when you go out to work? In what ways will it help/hinder?
13. What kind of behaviour does your English teacher expect from you in class? Do you agree with her/him?
14. What do you want to achieve most from your English class?

APPENDIX 3

TEACHERS' PROFILE FORM

Dear teacher,

Please note that all answers given to the items below will be treated in the strictest confidence. Your interest in and contribution to this research study is very much appreciated.

Name:.....

Years of teaching:.....

Teaching experience (levels, places & schools in order from previous to most recent)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Educational Qualifications (from previous to most recent):

.....  
.....  
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Professional Qualifications (from previous to most recent):

.....  
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.....

What are your teaching goals?

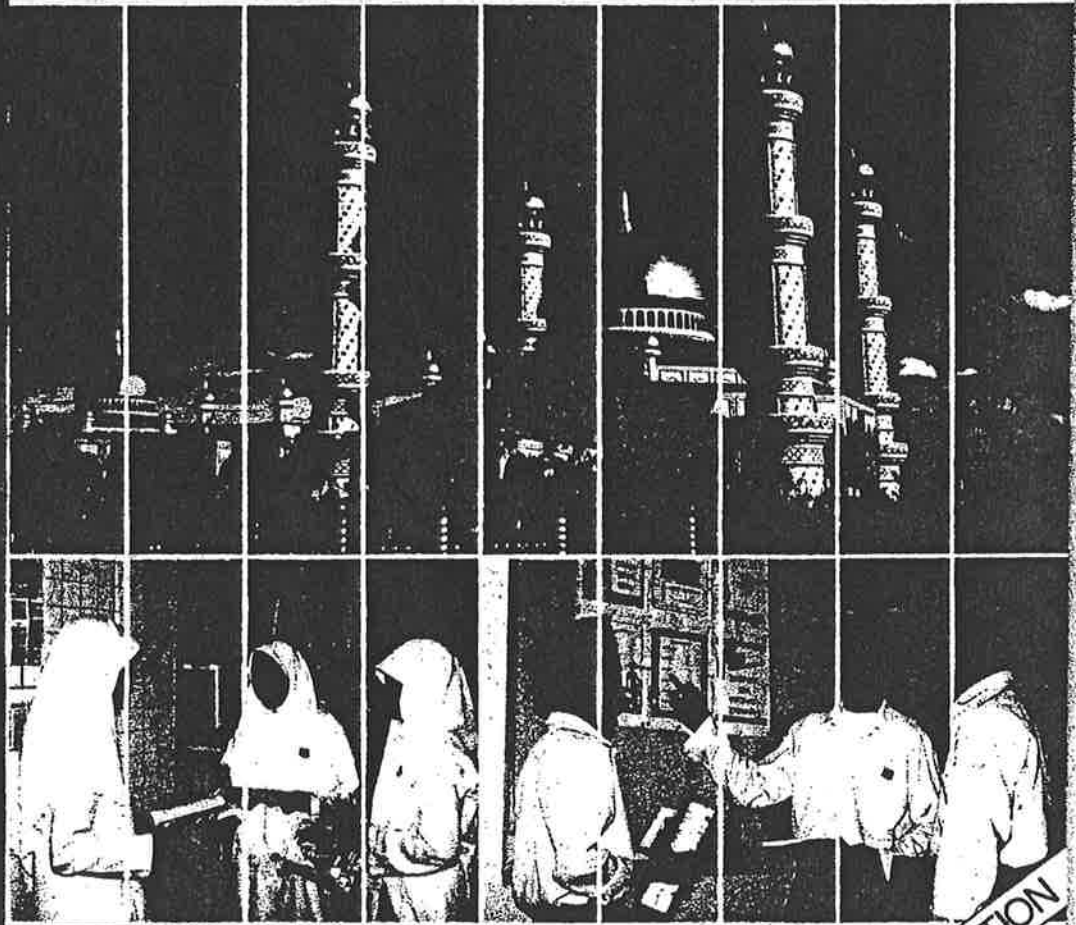
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Thank you!

APPENDIX 4

SAMPLE TEXTS TAKEN FROM A UNIT OF THE TEXTBOOK

# SECONDARY ENGLISH FOR BRUNEI DARUSSALAM 4



CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

NEW EDITION

*Secondary English for Brunei Darussalam. 4 /Curriculum Development Department,  
Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam* London. Macmillan, (1998)

NOTE: This publication is included in the print copy of the thesis  
held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**APPENDIX 5**  
**PMB EXAM PAPERS (PENILAIAN MENENGAH BAWAH) 2000**

**PAPER 1**

**PENILAIAN MENENGAH BAWAH**  
**2000**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE**  
**PAPER 1**

Time: 1½ hours

**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

1. Write your Centre, Index Number and Identity Card Number (IC No.) in the space provided.
2. Do not open this booklet until you are told to do so.
3. Answer **BOTH** Section A and Section B on the lined pages on the question paper.
4. You are given 5 minutes to look through the question paper.

**INFORMATION TO CANDIDATES**

1. The number of marks is given in brackets [ ] at the end of the question. The total number of marks for this paper is 40.
2. You will be given a piece of paper for rough work only.

---

---

**FOR THE USE OF MARKERS ONLY**

Marker's Code No.	
Checker's Code No.	

MARKS	
SECTION A	
SECTION B	
TOTAL	

**SECTION A**

You are advised to spend 50 minutes on this section and to write about 300 words.

Write a composition on **ONE** of the following topics:

1. Complete the following story:

It was Wednesday morning and Azman was driving to the International Airport. Suddenly, he remembered .....

2. **EITHER**

(a) The bully

**OR**

(b) The liar

3. When the spaceship landed.
4. Imagine that a law was passed in your country banning television sets and video machines. What would be the good points? What would be the disadvantages?
5. Recently, one of your friends was involved in a serious road accident. Write a letter to your local newspaper about what could be done to improve road safety. Include the following ideas:
- causes of accidents
  - what police/drivers/parents could do to reduce the number of road accidents

It is **not** necessary to write your address. Start your letter as follows:

Dear Sir,

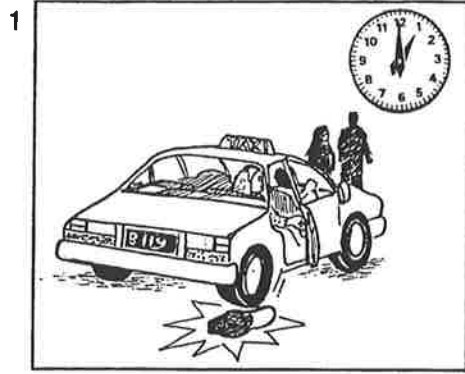
Recently, my friend .....

6. Look at the pictures on page 3. Write the story.

[25]



3



## SECTION B

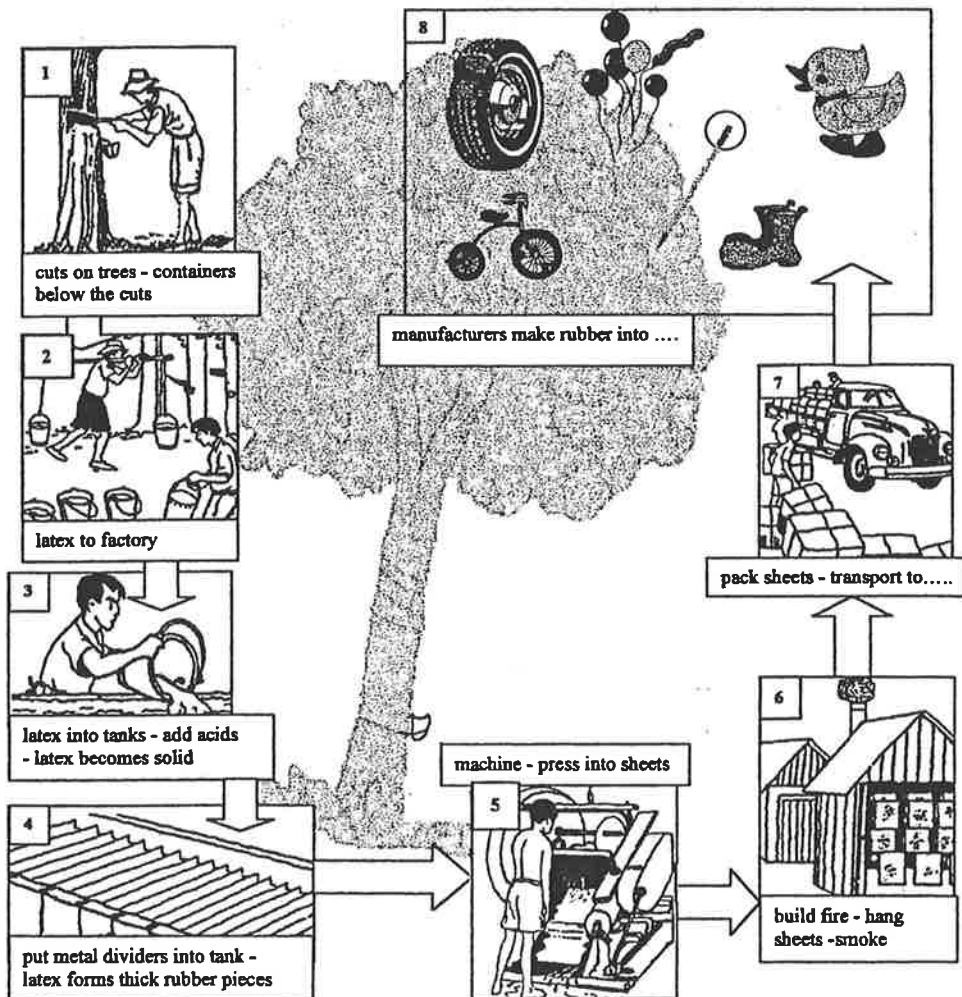
You are advised to spend about 40 minutes on this section and write not less than 150 words. Compositions shorter than 150 words will lose marks.

Write a composition on **ONE** of the following topics:

## EITHER

- The pictures below show you the different stages in the production of rubber. Look at the pictures and the notes given with each one. Use what you need from this to explain how to make rubber. You may include any suitable ideas of your own.

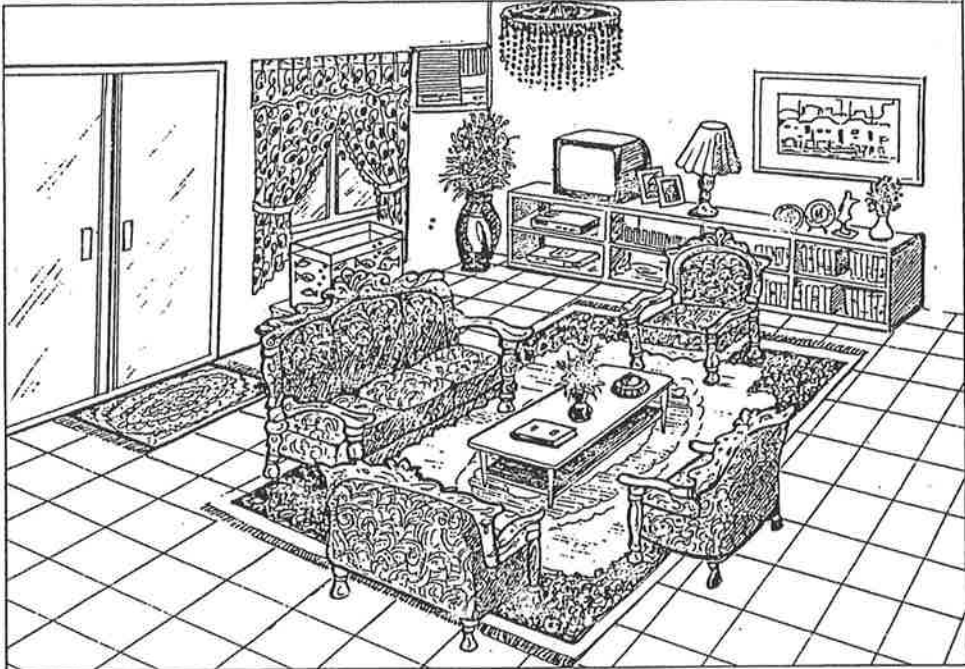
Write in complete sentences and use paragraphs.



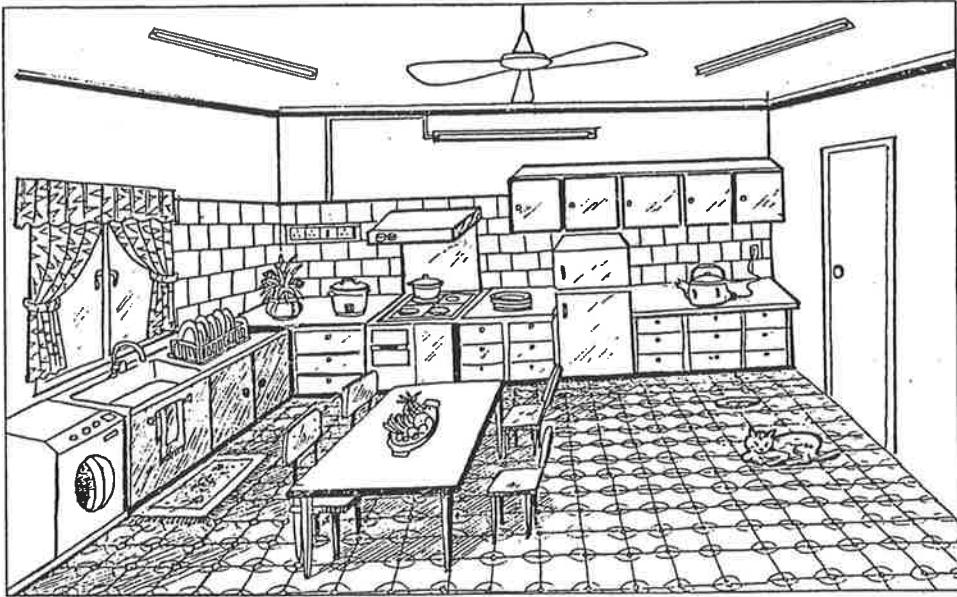
[15]

Turn over

A. LIVING ROOM



B. KITCHEN



OR

2. On the opposite page are pictures of two rooms in a house.

Compare these two rooms. Describe how they look and how they are used. You should include some of the points below. You may add ideas of your own.

Remember to write a **composition**, not just a list of items.

How the rooms look
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ decoration and furniture</li><li>◆ electrical items/appliances (e.g., lights, TV)</li><li>◆ household items (e.g., books, dishes)</li></ul>

How the rooms are used
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ entertainment</li><li>◆ food</li><li>◆ relaxation</li><li>◆ homework</li><li>◆ chores/jobs</li><li>◆ friends</li></ul>

[15]

**PENILAIAN MENENGAH BAWAH  
2000**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
PAPER 2  
Time: 1½ hours**

**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

1. Write your Centre, Index Number and Identity Card Number (IC No.) in the space provided.
2. Do not open this booklet until you are told to do so.
3. Answer **ALL** questions in Section A and Section B in the spaces provided on the question paper.
4. You are given **5 minutes** to look through the question paper.

**INFORMATION TO CANDIDATES**

The number of marks is given in brackets [ ] at the end of the question or part of the question. The total number of marks for this paper is 45.

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**FOR THE USE OF MARKERS ONLY**

Marker's Code No.	
Checker's Code No.	

MARKS	
SECTION A	
SECTION B	
<b>TOTAL</b>	

## SECTION A

Read the following passage carefully before you answer any questions. You are advised to answer the questions in the order set.

**The Titanic**

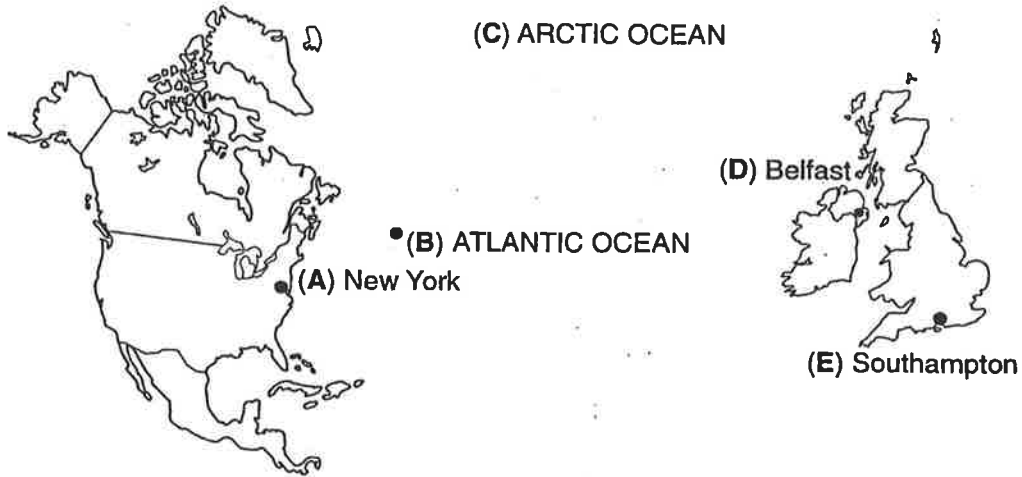
- 1 The sinking of the passenger ship the *Titanic* occurred early in the 20th century, but this terrible event still fascinates people today. It is the subject of many books, articles and computer web sites and the story was re-told in a hugely popular film released in 1998. After years of searching, the wreck of the ship was finally located on the North Atlantic seabed in 1986. 5
- 2 Constructed in Belfast in Northern Ireland, the *Titanic* was the largest moving object in the world. Weighing 46 000 tons, it was 270 metres long and as high as an eleven-story building. Its four funnels were each seven metres in diameter, and the rudder (at the back), used for steering the ship, was as big as a house. Its massive engines drove it through the water at nearly 50 kph, a speed which would take it across the Atlantic in about six days. 10
- 3 Apart from its size, the ship was famous for the unusually luxurious conditions on board. First class passengers could enjoy all the comforts of a top hotel, including expensive furnishings, lifts, shops, a swimming pool and a gymnasium. According to the builders, the *Titanic* was also 'designed to be unsinkable', with watertight compartments and other safety features. 15
- 4 On its **maiden voyage**, the *Titanic* left Southampton on 10th April, 1912, under the command of Captain Smith. It was bound for New York, with over 2 200 passengers on board, including many of the rich and famous of the time. On the fourth day, as it approached the coast of North America, the crew received radio messages from other ships that there were icebergs in that area of the ocean. These were huge chunks of ice, floating southwards from the Arctic. As night fell, the Captain told his officers to keep a close look-out for icebergs. 20  
25
- 5 The night was clear and calm, but there was no moonlight. In those days, too, there was no radar to warn ships of any danger. Suddenly, towards midnight, the crew spotted a dark shape straight ahead. They tried to slow the ship and turn it to the left, but it was too late. The *Titanic* struck the iceberg with a horrible scraping noise. It took some minutes before the crew realised how serious the damage was. Then they discovered that water was pouring in through a 60-metre gash on its right side. The captain gave the order to abandon ship. 30  
35

- 6 Over the next hour there was great confusion as the passengers—women and children first—were loaded into the lifeboats and the radio operators transmitted calls for help. It soon became clear that there were only enough lifeboats for a quarter of the passengers. Most of the men had to remain on board and hope for rescue, or jump into the sea. 40
- 7 Three hours after the collision, the ship broke in half. The front section sank first. Then the stern rose in the air; the remains of the *Titanic* plunged to the ocean floor with hundreds of people still clinging to it. The following morning, seven hundred survivors in the lifeboats were picked up by other ships which had received the radio messages. For those who had leapt into the icy water, or stayed on the ship, the rescuers were too late. Some 1 500 passengers and crew were drowned in one of the world's worst shipping disasters. 45

Answer the following questions:

From the whole passage

1. Look at the places marked with the letters A to E on the map. Write the correct letter in the ANSWER column.



	ANSWER
The <i>Titanic</i> was built here.	
Its first voyage began here.	
This was its destination.	
It struck an iceberg here.	
The iceberg came from here.	

[2½]

From paragraph 1

2. Which **one** word tells us that people are still very interested in the sinking of the *Titanic* today?

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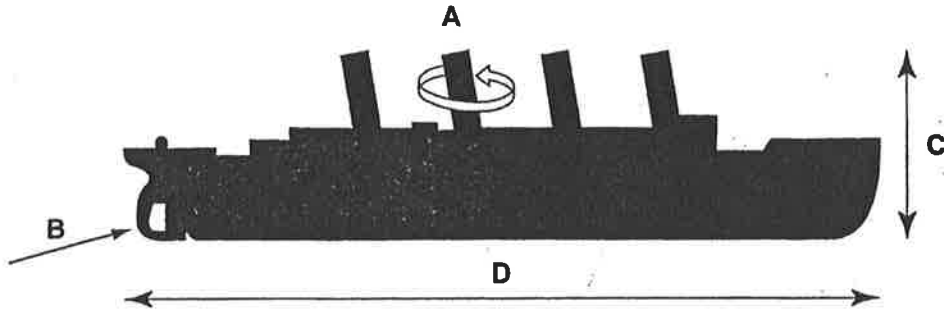
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[1]



From paragraph 2

3. On the lines below, write the numbers or expressions from the passage which show the **size** of the ship and its parts.



A \_\_\_\_\_ B \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_ D \_\_\_\_\_

[4]

From paragraph 3

4. Why do you think a ticket for a first class passenger would be expensive?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[2]

From paragraph 4

5. (a) Write in your **own words** the meaning of 'maiden voyage'. (line 20)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- (b) How did the captain know that there were icebergs in the area?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[2]

## From paragraph 5

6. (a) Which of the following contributed to the disaster? Circle the correct answer.

- A. The night was clear.
- B. The weather was calm.
- C. There was no moon.
- D. The ship was slow.

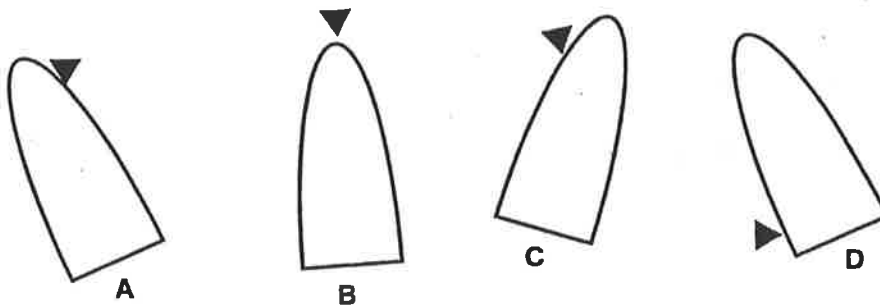
(b) Why would radar have made a difference?

---



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(c) In the diagrams A to D below, the triangle represents the iceberg. Which diagram shows where the *Titanic* was hit? Circle the correct answer.



[3]

## From paragraphs 5, 6 and 7

7. Give two reasons from these paragraphs why you think so many people died.

---



---

[2]

8. Which **one** word means 'to go down very quickly'?

---

---

[1]

9. Read the following statements. Tick **T** if they are true, **F** if they are false and **?** if the information is not given.

	<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>?</b>
(a) It was dark when the ship sank.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Most of those in the lifeboats were men.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Some of the people jumped into the sea.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) The crew didn't see the iceberg.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) The captain survived.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[2½]



## SECTION B

1. A former resident of Kampong Ayer is talking about her childhood in the water village and how things have changed. Read the passage and write the correct form of each verb given in brackets.

There was a season every year when everyone flew kites. I can still remember when mothers (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (scream) themselves hoarse, calling us kids in for meals. The boys would even climb onto the roofs in order to fly their kites.

Kampong Ayer (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (be) just like one big playground, and we were all very attached to one another. Now, thirty years later, we (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (grow) apart and hardly see one another. It is hard to imagine that the children who climbed on roofs and ran through the village now (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (work) as doctors, dentists, engineers or even journalists.

One night, when we (5) \_\_\_\_\_ (sleep), there was a loud knock on the door. Kampong Ayer was on fire! "How (6) \_\_\_\_\_ (this happen)?" everyone asked. The fire spread rapidly through the wooden houses. My mother took all our important documents. There was nothing else we could do. We (7) \_\_\_\_\_ (not stay). We had (8) \_\_\_\_\_ (move) to new homes on the land and rebuild our lives.

Kampong Ayer has a new face now. The wooden houses and catwalks are slowly disappearing. They have been replaced by concrete houses and bridges. In the midst of this change, the river (9) \_\_\_\_\_ (remain) the same. It flows today as it did in the past, and as it (10) \_\_\_\_\_ (flow) in the future.

[5]

2. Read the following letter from the *Borneo Bulletin*. Then fill in each blank with ONE suitable word.

DO THEY LOVE THEIR CHILDREN?

We see all kinds of bad behaviour on the roads, but I think the (1) \_\_\_\_\_ is the way children are allowed to travel in cars without seatbelts, or any other kind of protection. Every day, you can see children as young (2) \_\_\_\_\_ one or two years old sitting on their parents' laps or standing on the floor. Some stand on the passenger seat and have their faces pressed (3) \_\_\_\_\_ the windscreen. I have even seen a child in the driver's seat, with his hands on the steering wheel, while his father was driving with one hand and using a mobile phone with the (4) \_\_\_\_\_ one.

Are these parents aware of the dangers? Even if you are a skillful driver yourself, you cannot depend (5) \_\_\_\_\_ other people. An accident can always happen, however careful you may be. One moment, you have a happy, healthy child. The next, he or she may be dead, crippled (6) \_\_\_\_\_ scarred for life. (7) \_\_\_\_\_ take such risks?

I don't know (8) \_\_\_\_\_ Brunei Darussalam has a law to protect children in cars, but if not, I think there should be one. And if we do have such a law, the (9) \_\_\_\_\_ police should enforce it strictly. Drivers (10) \_\_\_\_\_ put children's lives at risk should be given a heavy fine, for example \$1 000. If they repeat the offence, they should automatically go to prison.

Gravely concerned,

Tutong

[5]

3. Choose the best answer for each of the following questions and write its letter in the box provided.

- (a) Dyg Fatimah flew to Singapore. She had to fill in an immigration form. What did she write in this space?

Duration of stay	
------------------	--

- A. Excelsior Hotel  
B. 28th September, 2000  
C. 5 days  
D. shopping and visiting friends

- (b) This is one of the instructions on a medicine packet:

Keep out of reach of children.  
Store in dry conditions at room temperature.

What should you do with it?

- A. Keep it in the refrigerator.  
B. Lock it in a kitchen cupboard.  
C. Put it under the bed.  
D. Leave it on a table in the bathroom.

- (c) In a newspaper, a report on a football match has this headline:

BRUNEI SQUEEZE PAST

Which score matches the headline?

- A. Brunei 3, Penang 2  
B. Brunei 3, Penang 0  
C. Penang 2, Brunei 1  
D. Penang 4, Brunei 0

- (d) An advertisement for Royal Brunei Airlines' pilot training scheme says:

You must be physically and mentally fit and have good eyesight that does not require the use of glasses or contact lenses.

This means:

- A. If your eyesight is not good, you must wear glasses or contact lenses.
- B. If you wear glasses, you must have a physical and mental examination.
- C. If you are physically and mentally fit, you do not need glasses.
- D. If you wear glasses, you will not be accepted.
- (e) You invite your friend to come to the cinema with you after school. Which is the correct reply?
- A. I'm sorry but I have to fetch my sister to tuition.
- B. I'm sorry but I have to take my sister to tuition.
- C. I'm sorry but I have to carry my sister to tuition.
- D. I'm sorry but I have to send my sister to tuition.

[5]

TOTAL MARKS	<input type="text"/>
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END OF PAPER



APPENDIX 6a

IGCSE "0" LEVELS NOVEMBER 1999

PAPER 1

Answer both Part One and Part Two.

Part One (40 marks)

Write on one of the following topics:

You are advised to spend about 60 minutes on this part of the paper and to write between 350 and 600 words.

- 1 Celebrating the Millennium (the year 2000).
- 2 Which household tasks are you prepared to do and which do you try to avoid?
- 3 Write a story about an event either (a) They did not see the danger until it was too late. or (b) The time when you failed to remember a friend's birthday.
- 4 Many students choose to travel overseas to study. Write about some of the advantages and disadvantages of overseas study.
- 5 'Saying goodbye.' Write about this subject in any way you choose.

Part Two (20 marks)

You are advised to spend about 30 minutes on this part of the paper, using 200-300 words.

Each year your school has an open day when parents of new pupils are invited to visit the school and see the work of the students. This year, your Principal has asked you to write a leaflet, a copy of which will be given to each family when they arrive; this will serve as a guide and a timetable of events.

You must include details of what can be seen in each of the following places:

- the hall - welcome by the Principal
- the classrooms ... special displays
- science laboratories

- practical areas such as workshops, domestic science or music rooms
- outdoor events

The tone should be welcoming and persuasive to show off the advantages of joining your particular school.

PAPER 2

(The passage describes the building of the liner Titanic and her subsequent sinking on her first voyage from England to America.)

- 1 Accounts of shipwrecks and other marine disasters exert a fascination that is all but universal. Disasters at sea are rich in examples of superhuman skill and determination, and, on occasion, criminal negligence, and sometimes more sinister behaviour. The name that inevitably springs to mind whenever disasters at sea are mentioned is *Titanic*. The loss of this ship in 1912 was particularly memorable not only because she sank on her first voyage after hitting an iceberg, but also because of the events that preceded the disaster.
- 2 The directors of the company that built *Titanic* were pioneers in the transatlantic passenger trade. However, they did not have much experience in the design and operation of appropriate vessels since ships of this class and size were a very recent innovation. Competition for contracts in the prestigious and lucrative business of the transatlantic run had spurred the major competitors to build increasingly larger and faster vessels. With *Titanic*, both technology and economics were pushed to their limits. Furthermore, it was the intention of her owner to build a vessel which was capable of operating at a competitive speed and also to focus on luxury as a means of attracting the wealthy. At the same time, *Titanic* was uniquely designed with a system of watertight compartments and electrically operated watertight doors. The designers got carried away by the advances they had made in the construction of the ship and this led them to make unwarranted and inaccurate claims for its safety. Their claim that *Titanic* was unsinkable was plausible but unfortunate in the light of subsequent events. It also encouraged the designers to ignore basic considerations of safety to which they might have otherwise given closer attention.

at some [11]

words [2]

tempted [2]

ises. For (of, not meaning [5]

forces in [5]

unmarise form that to some [16]

LINE 16 s writing, 60 words, [25]

in Nature [25]

[25]

- 3 One of these considerations should have been the number of lifeboats on board *Titanic*. Certainly she could have carried sufficient for all her passengers and crew without any difficulty; this was originally contemplated by the builders, but they later rejected the idea. If *Titanic* was truly unsinkable, why go to unnecessary expense and trouble to provide something that caution would dictate for a less advanced vessel? It is quite likely that this over-confidence in *Titanic's* capabilities was communicated to her crew. Thoughts of safety gave way to the exciting prospect of manning such a splendid vessel on her very first voyage. Undoubtedly the captain was a fine seaman of outstanding ability; he had commanded several vessels on their first voyages, and he had planned to retire from his long career at the completion of *Titanic's* first voyage. Any fears for her safety he might have had were diminished in the face of the enthusiasm of *Titanic's* owner for her outstanding qualities. Besides, the owner disliked any criticism of his judgement and so it is understandable that the captain hesitated to express any possible doubts about the equipment and safety of this ocean queen.
- 4 At noon on 10 April 1912 a long blast on *Titanic's* whistle signalled her imminent departure. Some people at the time expressed a certain wariness about that particular first voyage. Yet any faint premonitions of doom would have been hard to detect amid the eager anticipation which accompanied the first sailing of this superb ship. In fact, the ship's owner himself was among the passengers, along with a spectacular array of the most famous people of the day.
- 5 *Titanic* headed out into the grey Atlantic. Her massive engines were soon brought up to speed, and she steamed towards her icy destiny. Reports of huge icebergs were radioed in by other ships right from the start but were given little attention on board *Titanic*. The increasing throb of the engines gave promise of even higher speeds. Although the owner had earlier declared that there was no point in driving the ship too hard, the possibility of an early arrival in New York was too enticing to ignore; a record crossing on this first voyage would receive much publicity. Amidst all the excitement, a day had been set aside for lifeboat drill. This indeed might have helped later and stopped passengers from scrambling frantically for places in these boats. However, the captain made the mistake of postponing the drill out of deference to the many illustrious passengers on board.
- 6 Meanwhile, further reports showed icebergs nearly in the path of the huge liner; unfortunately, not all these reports reached her control room. Nevertheless, the captain and his officers clearly knew there was a distinct possibility, even likelihood, of encountering an iceberg during the night. The captain must have known the risk he was taking in maintaining *Titanic's* speed, but decided to take it anyway; to have slowed his ship under the circumstances would have suggested a degree of timidity out of keeping with his character. Also his reputation was involved; he was understandably proud of it and did not want to damage it at this stage in his career. This marvellous vessel he commanded was on her first voyage while he, ironically, was on his last.
- 7 The lookouts were specifically warned to watch for icebergs, yet they did not seem particularly concerned about this possibility. Nor had any extra lookouts been posted. No special instructions were given to the ship's engineers to stand by for possible emergency manoeuvres. The advisability of slowing the vessel to allow more time to react should an iceberg be sighted ahead does not appear to have been considered by the captain. This is hardly surprising as it would have thwarted the hope for an even higher speed on the following day.
- 8 When further messages about icebergs came in from the ship *Californian*, the young radio operator on *Titanic* ignored them. Although he was dedicated to his profession, he did not have that degree of judgement which comes from years of experience. Besides, the glamour of his job had made him arrogant. Meanwhile, as one of the lookouts neared the end of his watch, an ominous smudge about the size of his hand loomed on the horizon dead ahead. The object rapidly grew in size and distinctness. Convinced that one of the icebergs he had been warned about was directly in *Titanic's* path, the lookout raised the alert and watched helplessly as the ship hurtled towards the sheer grey wall of ice.
- 9 With hindsight, it has been suggested that *Titanic's* officers should not have reversed the engines and altered the ship's course. Its collision with the iceberg would then have been head on, and the damage, though serious, would not have been fatal. Their mistakes were catastrophic, no doubt. But the reaction of the officers was understandable; they merely responded to the instinct that would have prompted most seamen under these circumstances. As it was, the side of the ship took the full impact of

10 the iceberg; the damage to the water tight compartments was disastrous. Only about one third of the passengers and crew, who together numbered over 2000, escaped in the inadequate number of lifeboats; the rest drowned.

Amidst the frantic scramble for places in the lifeboats, the owner of *Titanic* exploited his role as a passenger and, as the last boats were being launched, seated himself in one of them. He was later persecuted by the press for not having gone down with his ship. Various conflicting stories were told about *Titanic's* gallant but tragic captain, yet none could be proved. Suffice to say, he went down with the ship and it is unlikely that he wanted to be included among those who survived. The sinking of *Titanic*, although partly a natural disaster, can also be seen as a man-made one, resulting from human avarice and complacency.

*Read the passage in the insert and then answer all the questions which follow below.*

*You are recommended to answer the questions in the order set.*

*Mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar may be penalised in any part of the Paper.*

From paragraph 1:

- 1 Give one reason why the loss of *Titanic* is 'particularly memorable' among disasters at sea. [1]

From paragraph 2:

- 2 (a) Ships like *Titanic* were a 'recent innovation'. What was the initial disadvantage the builders faced in designing such a ship? [1]
- (b) What two benefits were gained by ship owners who won contracts to build transatlantic ships? You must answer in your own words. [2]
- (c) In building *Titanic*, 'economics were pushed to their limits.' What is the author saying here? [2]
- (d) The builders of the ship claimed that it was unsinkable. What was there in its design that made them so confident? [1]

From paragraph 3:

- 3 From your reading of paragraph 3, suggest briefly the reason why some people felt wary about the first voyage of *Titanic* (line 63). [1]

From paragraph 5:

- 4 The captain decided to postpone the lifeboat drill. Explain in your own words why this proved to be an

unwise decision later. [2]

From paragraph 6:

- 5 (a) The captain maintained *Titanic's* speed to avoid any suggestion of timidity. What other reason did he have for maintaining her speed? [1]
- (b) The captain was 'ironically' on his last voyage. Explain fully what this means. [2]

From paragraph 8:

- 6 (a) The young radio operator misjudged the importance of radio messages reaching *Titanic*. Using your own words, give two reasons for his lack of judgement. [2]
- (b) *Titanic* 'hurtled' towards the iceberg in its path. Apart from the notion of speed, what other idea do you think is emphasised by 'hurtled'? [1]

From paragraph 9:

- 7 Perhaps it would have been better if *Titanic's* officers had ignored their seamen's instinct at the last moment. Explain why. [2]

From paragraph 10:

- 8 The author believes that Nature alone did not cause the disaster of *Titanic*. Explain in your own words what else he thinks was the cause. [2]

From the whole passage:

- 9 Choose five of the following words or phrases. For each of them give one word or short phrase (of not more than seven words) which has the same meaning that the word or phrase has in the passage.
- |                              |                           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. rich (line 3)             | 5. contemplated (line 41) |
| 2. spurred (line 19)         | 6. imminent (line 62)     |
| 3. plausible (line 33)       | 7. enticing (line 80)     |
| 4. in the light of (line 33) | 8. ominous (line 123)     |
- [5]

- 10 Different groups of people were responsible for the disaster that overtook *Titanic*.

Using your own words as far as possible, summarise how the actions of these people contributed to the disaster.

**USE ONLY THE MATERIAL FROM LINE 40 TO LINE 144.**

Your summary, which must be in continuous writing (not note form), must not be longer than 160 words, including the 10 words given below.

Begin your summary as follows:

The builders could have installed enough lifeboats on *Titanic* but. [25]

FORM FIVE

**MOCK EXAMINATION - 2001**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE – PAPER 2**

**CLASS : FORM FIVE..... TIME : 1 Hour 30 Minutes**

**DATE : WEDNESDAY 19<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2001 7.30 – 9.00 a.m.**

**NAME .....**

**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES :**

- 1. You are to answer ALL questions**
- 2. Write your answers on the separate answer paper provided.**
- 3. Leave a space of one line between your answers to each part of a question, e.g. between 2 (a) and 2 (b). Leave a space of at least three lines after your completed answer to each whole question.**
- 4. The number of marks is given in brackets ( ) at the end of each question or part question .**
- 5. Mistakes in spelling , punctuation and grammar may be penalized in part of the paper.**

<b>TOTAL MARKS</b>	
------------------------	--

**This question paper consists of 5 pages**

Read the following passage carefully before you attempt any questions. Answer all the questions. You are recommended to answer them in the order set. Mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar may be penalised in any part of the paper.

- 1 My father became the possessor of a second-hand car. It was a British car, one of those baby Austins of the thirties. We, on our tropical island, however, were more used to American cars, called 'matchboxes'. On the street my father already had the reputation of being a bottle-breaker and cafe-wrecker; the arrival of the baby Austin was a sign of respectability and steadiness, suggesting something different. People started calling him 'a radical'. On our island this was always a word of approval; it described an unconventional person or someone who was 'a character'. A change came over my father. He had to buy petrol, get the car serviced, and was always deep in discussion with inefficient but impressively greasy mechanics: he felt both important and yet full of anxieties. Now his interest in the world revived. He spoke more loudly at home and in public and, in a peculiar way, he tried very hard to be witty. He repeated your sentences and laughed; he replied to questions by asking absurd questions of his own; he took your phrases and turned them into awkward questions and laughed. It was disturbing. He would sing to himself while he drove; he was determined to find humour and interest in everything. It was fatiguing.
- 2 At the same time, he made some effort to draw his family together. To keep us at home during the weekends, he instituted a 'family lunch' on Sundays to replace our haphazard, private custom of each person simply helping himself from the kitchen. It was at one of these uncomfortable 'family lunches' — the last, as it turned out — that he embarrassed us by making a formal little speech. He said, "There is no need to tell you, my clever family, that life is brief and unpredictable. Here today, for example, we all sit, a complete family, each close to the other, each knowing the other well. Do you know that this might be the last time we do so? Nothing stands still. Our meal today is a moment of perfection. I would like us all to be silent for a little while and think about this moment."
- 3 He was quite overcome by his own eloquent words. We finished our meal in miserable silence. Afterwards he became sadly gay: it was a continuation of the same unusual mood. He said we should dress up for a family outing. My sisters and I were not excited. We were unfamiliar with cars and a Sunday family outing was something we affiliated with other people: their packed family cars, polished-like treasure, going slowly to nowhere in particular. But there could be no denying my father. We dressed, squeezed into the car and prayed we wouldn't be recognised. There was some trouble about getting the car to start. This gave us hope, but not for long. On my father's instructions we all got out — my sisters, my mother and myself — and rocked the little Austin to and fro. The engine gave a kick and came confidently to life. We were relieved, though, that my father didn't take us on the usual Sunday afternoon circuit of the city. He drove us out of the city, and then our relief was balanced by the anxiety about the ability of the little ticktocking engine to take the hills, which were numerous and steep. We listened to the beat of the engine and to my father's commentary about the countryside as we drove along narrow rough roads

4 "Oh God, Pa!" one of my sisters cried. "You knocked that lady's bucket out of her hand." He had. The woman was at the roadside standpipe, bucketless, a picture of shock and amazement. My father looked back to see. And at that moment I saw a cyclist, leaning on his bike and chatting on the grass verge, suddenly, with the briskness of a character in an animated cartoon, twisted the handlebars of his bicycle out of the path of the Austin. 45

5 "Oh God, Pa! Look where you're going." It was the irritation in my sister's voice which upset my father. He began to mutter to himself and to bite his lower lip. He always over-acted. The winding road had straightened out to run along the top of an embankment. At the foot of each steep slope of this embankment there was a little line of trees. The sight of the straight empty road seemed to decide my father. 50

6 "Women!" he said, lifting his hands off the steering wheel and accelerating. We shot across the road and rolled swiftly down the embankment. A split second separated this abrupt deviation and my sisters' screams. We rolled swiftly — but to me it was all happening in slow motion — towards the trunks of the trees. That baby Austin had its points, though. We went straight between the tree trunks without touching. A series of soft, grassy bumps followed and the car came to rest on its side. The engine cut out and there was silence until my sisters remembered to scream again. They scrambled out of the car as fast as they could and climbed up the bank to the road, getting such help as they could out of grass and weeds. They said they had no intention of being driven back to the city with my father; they would rather walk until they found a bus or a taxi. My mother called them back not to make them change their minds, but to give them money for the journey. Her manner indicated that it was her duty to stay with her husband. 65

7 It didn't take much to right the Austin. Presently we were pulled out by a passing lorry, with the driver and driver's family — all in their Sunday best, all in the cab: it was their Sunday afternoon outing as well. We picked up my sisters. They had already begun to droop a little and scarcely needed to be persuaded: they also welcomed the opportunity to abuse my father. My father ignored them; he sang all the way back. But as soon as we were home he became sulky. His face was drawn; the pouches under his eyes went dark; the unusual mood of the day now showed itself to have been a type of hysteria. He locked himself in his room, answered none of my mother's calls, and didn't come out even to have a cup of tea. 70

8 So ended our first and last Sunday family outing; and so our 'family lunches' ended as well. My father withdrew once more. The baby Austin ceased to be comic and we were happier whenever it was in the garage because of some defect. 75

V.S. NAIPAUL (adapted)

Answer all the questions. You are recommended to answer them in the order set.

1. From paragraph 1:

- (a) (i) In your own words, explain the phrase 'of the thirties' (line 2).  
 (ii) What does the popular name 'matchboxes' (line 3) tell us about the car?  
 (iii) Why would a mechanic's greasy overalls make him impressive? (3 marks)
- (b) The first paragraph tells us of a change in the father's behaviour. Describe in your own words the two different effects of this behaviour on the family. (2 marks)

From paragraph 2:

- (c) (i) Why does the author feel 'uncomfortable' (line 19) at the family lunch?  
 (ii) What point was the father making by calling life 'unpredictable' (line 21)?  
 (2 marks)

2. From paragraph 3:

- (a) (i) What is meant by 'eloquent words' (line 26)?  
 (ii) What is meant by saying that the father was 'quite overcome' (line 26)?  
 (2 marks)
- (b) The children were not excited by the prospect of a Sunday outing and they disapproved of the practice. In your own words, explain:  
 (i) the reason why they were not excited.  
 (ii) the four reasons for their objecting to Sunday outings in a car. (3 marks)
- (c) (i) 'This gave us hope' (line 33). What did they hope for?  
 (ii) Why were the children relieved when their ride took them out of the city?  
 (2 marks)

3. (a) Choose FIVE of the following words or phrases. For each of them, give one word or short phrase (of not more than seven words) which has the same meaning as the words used in the passage.

- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. peculiar (line 11)   | 5. unfamiliar (line 29)   |
| 2. fatiguing (line 15)  | 6. affiliated (line 30)   |
| 3. instituted (line 17) | 7. accelerating (line 53) |
| 4. haphazard (line 18)  | 8. duty (line 65)         |
- (5 marks)

From paragraph 6:

- (b) Why did the author's father  
 (i) exclaim 'women!' (line 53)?  
 (ii) 'lift his hands off the steering wheel' (line 53)?  
 (2 marks)

From paragraph 7:

- (c) In your own words, give two reasons why the author's sisters decided to come home with their father.  
 (2 marks)

From the whole passage:

- (d) In line 10, 'his interest in the world revived'.  
 In line 50, the father 'over-acted'.  
 (i) Quote one sentence that shows that the revival of his interest in the world was

4. Suppose the author's father were to write in his diary an account of what had happened after he decided to take his family out for that Sunday drive. Write a summary relating only to the events that occurred.

**USE ONLY MATERIAL FROM LINE 26 TO LINE 74.**

Your summary, which should be in continuous writing, must not be longer than 160 words, including the 10 words given below.

Begin your summary as follows:

*After lunch, I took the family out in the car...*

25 marks)

**END OF PAPER**



**SUBJECT : ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**PAPER NO : PAPER 1**

**DATE OF EXAM : Wednesday, 12-09-2001**

**TIME : 7.30 – 9.00 a.m. (1 hour 30 minutes)**

**NAME :**

**FORM 5 A / B / C**

**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

Write your name, centre number and candidate number in the spaces provided in the answer paper/answer booklet.

Answer both **Part One** and **Part Two**.

Write your answers on the separate answer paper provided.

If you use more than one sheet of paper, fasten the sheets together.

**Part One**

Write on one of the following topics.

At the head of your composition put the number of the topic you have chosen.

**You are advised to spend about 60 minutes on this part of the paper and to write between 350 and 600 words. Total marks for this part: 40**

1. My greatest challenge.
2. Describe an experience when you misjudged someone.
3. The pleasures and responsibilities of owning a pet.
4. Write a story on  
Either (a) The gift.  
Or (b) He/she always avoided me after that.

**Part Two**

Begin your answer on a fresh page.

**You are advised to spend about 30 minutes on this part of the paper, using 200-300 words. Total marks for this part: 20**

6. You were lost for three days while trekking in the Malaysian jungles.

Describe how you got lost, what you did in order to survive and how you were finally rescued. Use the following notes and add relevant details.

- went off familiar tracks
- thick mist impeded vision
- made suitable shelter
- foraged for edible fruits
- stayed close to stream
- used glasses to start fire
- found by Malaysian jungle patrol

## Oral English Test

DAY 3

## READING PASSAGE 9

*Mr Seal almost shares his happiness.*

Seal, walking through his garden, said suddenly to himself: 'I would like to pick some flowers and take them to Miss D.'

The afternoon was light and warm. Tall chestnuts fanned themselves in a pleasant breeze. Among the roses there was a good humming as the bees tumbled from flower to flower.

Seal felt a great joy in the flowers around him and from this a brilliant longing to give. He wished to give without thinking for a moment: 'Here am I, Seal, wishing something.' Seal merely wanted to give some of his flowers to a fellow being. It had happened that Miss D was the first person to come to mind. He was in no way attached to Miss D. He knew her slightly, as a plain, elderly girl of about twenty who had come to live in the flats opposite his garden. If Seal had ever thought about Miss D at all, it was because he disliked the way she walked. But he was not thinking of this now. Just by chance he had glimpsed the block of flats as he had stooped to pick a flower. The flats had presented the image of Miss D to his mind.

Seal chose common, ordinary flowers. As the stems broke he whistled between his teeth. He had chosen these ordinary flowers because they were the nearest to hand: in the second place, because they were fresh and full of life. They were neither rare nor costly. They were pleasant, fresh, unassuming flowers.

With the flowers in his hand, Seal walked contentedly from his garden and set foot on the pavement that led to the block of flats across the way. But as his foot touched the pavement certain misgivings began to freeze his joy. 'Good heavens,' he suddenly thought, 'what am I doing?' He stepped outside himself and saw Seal carrying a bunch of cheap flowers to Miss D in the flats across the way.

From her window high up in the concrete flats, Miss D watched Seal drop the flowers. How fresh they looked! How they would have livened her barren room! 'Wouldn't it have been nice,' thought Miss D, 'if that Mr Seal had been bringing me that pretty bouquet of flowers! Wouldn't it have been nice if he had picked them in his own garden and — well, just brought them along, quite casually, and made me a present of the delightful afternoon.' Miss D dreamed on for a few minutes.

Then she frowned, and hurried into the kitchen. 'Thank goodness he didn't,' she sighed to herself. 'I should have been most embarrassed.'

Adapted from *Difficulty with a Bouquet* by William Sansom

## CONVERSATION TOPIC 9

The spirit of competition in school

Marking Schemes for the BGCE "0" LEVELS ENGLISH PAPERS



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
Local Examinations Syndicate

# ENGLISH SUBJECTS GENERAL PAPER GENERAL STUDIES

Examination Syllabuses for 2000  
(International Examinations)

26/8  
pp. 1**ENGLISH LANGUAGE** for the photocopied thick one pp. 1**IMPORTANT NOTE**

Candidates for *English Language* **MUST** enter as follows:

- (a) Candidates in the **Caribbean area** *must* enter for **Subject 1115**;
- (b) Candidates in **Singapore and Brunei** *must* enter for **Subject 1120**;
- (c) Candidates in **Zambia** *must* enter for **Subject 1121(\*)**;
- (d) Candidates in **Seychelles** *must* enter for **Subject 1124**;
- (e) Candidates in **Mauritius** *must* enter for **Subject 1125 or 1126**;
- (f) Candidates elsewhere *must* enter for **Subject 1123**.

*No candidate may enter for more than one English Language subject. Syllabuses 1115, 1120, 1123, 1124 are available in June and November. Syllabuses 1121, 1125 and 1126 are available in November only.*

**AIMS**

To develop the ability of candidates to:

- communicate accurately, appropriately and effectively in speech and writing;
- understand and respond appropriately and imaginatively to what they read and experience;
- enjoy and appreciate reading texts in the English Language.

These aims form the basis of a course of study; they may not all be translated into assessment objectives for formal examination.

**ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES**

Candidates should be able to:

- (i) recount personal experience, views and feelings;
- (ii) use language to inform and explain;
- (iii) show an awareness of how spoken and written communication varies according to situation, purpose and audience;
- (iv) read a variety of texts accurately and with confidence;
- (v) select, retrieve, evaluate and combine information from written texts;
- (vi) appreciate the ways writers make use of language;
- (vii) employ different forms of writing to suit a range of purposes;
- (viii) plan, organise and paragraph, using appropriate punctuation;
- (ix) choose a vocabulary which is suited to its purpose and audience, and use correct grammar and punctuation;
- (x) write in Standard English;
- (xi) spell accurately the words within the working vocabulary;
- (xii) write legibly, and present finished work clearly and attractively.

**GCE (O) Subjects 1115, 1120, 1123, 1124, 1125**

**IMPORTANT.** *These subjects are available only as stated in Notes (a), (b), (d), (e) and (f) above*

Two compulsory papers will be set in all subjects as follows:

- Paper 1 (composition) (1½ hrs.) (60 marks)
- Paper 2 (comprehension) (1½ hrs.) (50 marks)

A third compulsory paper (oral test) is set for candidates in Singapore (Paper 1120/3), Brunei (Paper 1120/4) and Mauritius (1125/3).

PAPER 1 will contain:

- (a) A composition on one of a number of alternative subjects.
- (b) A task based on a situation described in detail, in words or diagrams.

For information on the Grade Descriptions for Continuous Writing (Composition) see Appendix A.

## ENGLISH SUBJECTS

Appendix 6c

PAPER 2 will consist of a passage or passages of prose upon which questions will be set to test the candidates' ability to understand the content and argument of the given text and to infer information and meanings from it. A question will be included to test the ability to summarise and will be assigned 25 marks.

In this question the Examiners reward the selection of precise and relevant detail, a mark being given for each relevant point selected. The maximum number of points that is available for selection is greater than the total mark assigned for this section, i.e. a candidate can score full marks for the content selected without mentioning all the points.

About a third of the marks in the question is also allocated for the style and presentation of the answer. Candidates are rewarded for the relevance and organisation of their answers, the ability to rephrase the original language in their own words and sentence structures, and the overall accuracy of their written English.

PAPER 3 will consist of Reading Aloud and Conversation. In 1120/3 and 1125/3 there will also be Picture Discussion. In Singapore and Brunei (1120/3 and 1120/4) the Oral mark is part of the final mark for the subject. The relative weighting of the three components is as follows:

Paper 1: 42%

Paper 2: 42%

Paper 3: 16%

In Mauritius (1125/3) the Oral will be graded and reported separately on a scale of 1 (high) to 5 (low). The weighting of the other two papers remains at 50% each (also in Subjects 1115, 1123 and 1124).

### **GCE (O) Subject 1126 (Mauritius only: Syllabus B)**

Three compulsory papers will be set as follows:

Paper 1 (Reading and Directed Writing) (2 hrs.) 60%

Paper 2 (Continuous Writing) (1¼ hrs.) 40%

Paper 3 (Oral – as 1125/3 above).

Paper 1: *Part 1* will consist of a prose extract followed by six multiple-choice questions which will test the candidates' understanding of the main points of the structure and the argument, and four open-ended questions which will test other aspects of the extract, such as the use of language and the author's attitude towards the subject matter. *Part 2* Candidates will be asked to respond to a second passage in a variety of ways, for example a selective summary, a letter, a report, a speech, a script of a conversation or broadcast, a continuation of a story, an expressive development of an idea in the passage, etc. Two tasks will be set, one of which may be subdivided.

The two set passages will usually be of a different nature: one may be informative or argumentative while the other may be from a literary source.

Paper 2: This paper will test candidates' skill in continuous writing. A selection of nine titles will be provided calling for an imaginative, narrative or argumentative response in an appropriate style. Candidates will be required to choose one assignment and will be advised to write 350-500 words. For information on the Grade Descriptions for Continuous Writing see Appendix A.

Paper 3: The Oral test will comprise Reading Aloud, Picture Discussion and Conversation on a related topic. This component will be separately graded and reported on a scale of 1 (high) to 5 (low).

## GRADE DESCRIPTIONS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF CONTINUOUS WRITING

- A1/A2**  
36-40      Apart from very occasional slips, the language is accurate. Sentence structure is varied and demonstrates the candidate's skill to use different lengths and types of sentences for particular effects. Vocabulary is wide and precise. Punctuation is accurate and helpful to the reader. Spelling is accurate across the full range of vocabulary used. Paragraphs have unity, are linked, and show evidence of planning. The topic is addressed with consistent relevance; the interest of the reader is aroused and sustained.
- B3/B4**  
31-35      The language is accurate; occasional errors are either slips or arise from attempts to use ambitious structures or vocabulary that may be imperfectly understood. Vocabulary is wide enough to convey intended shades of meaning with some precision. Sentences show some variation of length and type, including the confident use of complex sentences. Punctuation is accurate and generally helpful. Spelling is nearly always accurate. Paragraphs show some evidence of planning, have unity and are usually appropriately linked. The response is relevant, and the interest of the reader is aroused and sustained through most of the composition.
- C5/C6**  
26-30      Vocabulary and structures are mainly correct when they are simple; mistakes may occur when more sophistication is attempted. Sentences may show some variety of structure and length, although there may be a tendency to repeat sentence types and 'shapes', producing a monotonous effect. Spelling of simple vocabulary is accurate; errors may occur when more ambitious vocabulary is used. Punctuation is generally accurate, although errors may occur when more difficult tasks are attempted eg the punctuation of direct speech. Sentence separation is correct. The composition is written in paragraphs which may show some unity, although links may be absent or inappropriate. The composition is relevant and will arouse some interest in the reader.
- D7**  
21-25      The meaning is generally clear. There will be patches of accurate language, particularly when simple vocabulary and structures are used. There may be some variety of sentence length and structure, but the reader may not be convinced that this variety is for a particular purpose. Vocabulary is usually adequate to convey intended meaning, although it may be insufficiently developed to achieve precision. Idiom may be uncertain at times. Punctuation will be used but may not enhance/clarify meaning. Some sentence separation errors may occur occasionally. Simple words will be spelt accurately, but more complex vocabulary may show some spelling weakness. Paragraphs will be used but may lack unity or coherence. A genuine attempt has been made to address the topic, but there may be digressions or failures of logic. Compositions may lack liveliness and interest value.
- E8**  
16-20      Meaning is never in doubt, but the errors are sufficiently frequent and serious to hamper precision, and may slow down speed of reading. Some simple structures will be accurate, but the script is unlikely to sustain accuracy for long. Vocabulary may be limited, either too simple to convey precise meaning or more ambitious but imperfectly understood. Some idiomatic errors are likely. Simple punctuation will usually be accurate, but there may be frequent sentence separation errors. Simple words will usually be spelt correctly, but there may be inconsistency, and frequent mistakes in the spelling of more difficult words. Paragraphs may lack unity or be used haphazardly. The subject matter will show some relevance. The incidence of linguistic error is likely to distract the reader from merits of content.

- U9i  
11-15      **There will be many serious errors of various kinds throughout the script, but they will be of the 'single-word' type ie they could be corrected without re-writing the sentence. Communication is established, although the weight of error may cause 'blurring' from time to time. Sentences will probably be simple and repetitive in structure. Vocabulary will convey meaning but is likely to be simple and imprecise. Errors in idiomatic usage will be a significant feature. Spelling may be inconsistent. Paragraphing may be haphazard or non-existent. There may be evidence of interesting and relevant subject matter, but the weight of linguistic error will tend to obscure or neutralise its effect.**
- U9ii  
6-10      **Sense will usually be decipherable but some of the error will be multiple ie requiring the reader to re-read and re-organise before meaning becomes clear. There are unlikely to be more than a few accurate sentences, however simple, in the whole composition. The content is likely to be comprehensible, but may be partly hidden by the density of the linguistic error.**
- U9iii  
0-5      **Scripts are entirely, or almost entirely impossible to recognise as pieces of English writing. Whole sections will make no sense at all. Where occasional patches of relative clarity are evident some marks will be given. The mark of 0 is reserved for scripts that make no sense at all from beginning to end.**



## APPENDIX 7

### SAMPLES OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITTEN EXERCISES

7a. Supply a verb in agreement with the subject

1. None of us \_\_\_\_\_ seen him.
  2. Everyone \_\_\_\_\_ frightened when he \_\_\_\_\_ the tiger.
  3. Each person \_\_\_\_\_ a hat.
  4. Everybody \_\_\_\_\_ a hat.
  5. Every man \_\_\_\_\_ this (know/knows)
  6. Neither man \_\_\_\_\_ come.
  7. Each of us \_\_\_\_\_ his home (love/loves).
  8. The committee \_\_\_\_\_ to meet tomorrow.
  9. None of the boys in the class \_\_\_\_\_ learnt his lesson.
- 

7b. Relative Pronouns

1. The men have gone home for lunch. They work at the garage here.
  2. Is that the boy? He saved the child from drowning.
  3. He asked me about the bicycle. He left it outside the shed.
  4. She showed us the embroidery piece. She had been working on it the whole week.
  5. Do you know the contestant? He is wearing a red sweater.
  6. I closed the window. It was banging about in the wind.
  7. The only time was to ask him for the key. I spoke to him.
  8. That car belongs to the man. He lives in that big house.
  9. The snake was identified as a viper. It bit the man.
  10. The flats are to be pulled down. They were partly destroyed in the fire.
-

TEACHERS' SCHEME OF INSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH  
SCHEME OF INSTRUCTION

ENGLISH - FORM TWO (Textbook (2022))

UNIT	TOPICS	STRUCTURES	USE OF LANGUAGE	FUNCTIONS	
1 HABITS AND ROUTINES	Hours: A day, in the Life of Customs Officer; People and Jobs	Present simple, there is/are, size/any, how many...? 'wh' questions, the time, countable and uncountable nouns	Giving personal information Describing routines	'Cikgu Daud's Day'	
2 TRANSPORT	Types of Transport; History of REA; The Most Famous Car in the World	Definite and indefinite articles, the past tense, comparative and superlative adjectives	Giving directions Making comparisons	Making Satay	
3 ASEAN	Competitions and prizes; Careless Kassim; The Ship for Southeast Asia Youth Sentosa	'Going to' The present perfect tense with just/already/yet	Describing intentions, Making predictions	Writing a letter	It (strong/weaker)
4 KEEPING FIT	Abdullah's Shoes; Sven Hansen; Smoking	Likes and dislikes Why...? Because... In order to So The present perfect tense with 'ever'	Giving reasons and explanations Talking about experiences	Writing a questionnaire	o:/o (short/short)
5 ITINERARIES	REA itinerary; Tour Itinerary for Northern Territory, Australia; Personal Itineraries; The Trans-Borneo Rally;	Present simple for timetables and itineraries Present continuous for future plans	Talking about travel plans Talking about plans for the future	Writing a letter	s/ / (sip/ship)
6 PEOPLE AND PLACES	Kampung Guru; Nakhoda Manis; Five Famous People; Sir Stamford Raffles	Relative pronouns who/there/which	Describing people	Writing a biography	ɪ/æ / ʌ (ring/rang/rung) ɪ / e / ʌ (pin/pen/pun)
7 DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS	Ship-reck; A Job for Kassim; Nakhoda Manis; Four Fables;	Hasn't, must, should have	Job Applications	'The Mousedeer and the Tiger'	e/ɛt (let/late)
8 ACCIDENTS AND FIRES	The Fire at Puan Norzaini's Home; More about Careless Kassim; Kampung Fire Blaze;	The past continuous tense, interrupted actions in the past, concurrence in the past	Interviews about past events	Fire!	æ / a: (am/arm)

The past continuous interrupted act past, concurrent

The past continuous interrupted act past, concurrent

(ward)

UNIT	TOPICS	STRUCTURES	USE OF LANGUAGE	COMPOSITION	
9 RECEIVING NEWS AND VIEWS	A Classroom Debate; Interviews; An Unpleasant Adventure; A Telephone Conversation;	Direct and Indirect Speech	Giving opinions	Writing a narrative, dialogue Punctuation	
10 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES	Five Boys; Linking Sentences; The Arrest; Class 2A and Class 2G Mauritius and Sri Lanka;	Both, neither, some, all, none. Conjunctions: but, although, however, since, as, because, so, therefore	Comparing and contrasting information	Writing a narrative	was/wasn't was/were
11 SURVIVAL	Shipwrecked; Jungle Survival; Robinson Crusoe, Interviews	The Gerund: Avoid doing; Before doing; To be keen on doing etc	Describing likes and dislikes	'Air Crash'	ai /ai(r) (high/higher)
12 PROBLEMS AND ADVICE	What would you do? Daydreaming; Dear Doctor; A Letter from Dayang Aminah	The Second Conditional: If I saw a snake, I would call for help.	Giving Advice	Writing a letter of Advice	ei /ai (pain/pine)
13 THE WAY WE WERE	Now and Then; Changing Habits; Unwelcome Sounds of the 90's; Three Generations	'Used to' Adverbs and Adjectives	Comparing the past and present	Bandar Seri Begawan Then and now	oi /ai (boys/buys)
14 THE WEATHER	Thunder and Lightning; All About Rain; Tropical Storms; Doom Island; The Hidden Treasure; The Search for the Treasure	The present passive Discussing options	Describing processes	Writing a narrative	oi /ou (bought/boat)
15 CRIME	What Did They Say?; The Robbery; How to Write Sequences; The Great Train Robbery; The News Bulletin	Reported Speech Past perfect tense with by the time/after/as soon as	Reporting speech, Describing sequences	Describing a sequence of events: The Bank Robbery	ei /ea(r) (they/they're)



SCHEME OF INSTRUCTION

## APPENDIX 9

### SAMPLES OF TEACHERS' LESSON NOTES

A.

SUBJECT	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	SATURDAY	REMARKS
	E (4CS) Composition	E (4CS) Reading with contextualised work	E (5C) Mock	E (5C) Mock		
	E (4CS) - do -	E (3R) Mock		E (5C) Mock		
			E (3R) Mock	E (4S2) Reading for comprehension	E (4S2) Idiomatic Expression	
	E (3R) Revision for Mock (wkbk)		E (3R) Mock	E (4S2) - do -	E(4S2) Usage	
	E (5C) Library	E (4S2) Phrasal verbs		E (4CS) Phrasal verbs	E (4CS) Preposition	
		E (5C) Mock	E (4CS) Word building (oral activity)			
	E (4S2) Library	E (5C) - do -		W (3R) Mock		

Key: E = English  
4CS = class  
Mock = mock exams

B.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Saturday	Remarks
	<b>GRAMMAR</b> Determinatives with Countables	<b>VOCABULARY</b> Cloze passage	<b>COMPREHENSION</b> An unpleasant Adventure – Part 1 NEBD 2 pg. 89-91	<u>WORKBOOK</u>	
<b>COMPO/ COMPRE</b>	<b>GRAMMAR</b> Review of tenses Clue 2 pg. 289	<b>GRAMMAR</b> Review of tenses pg.290		<b>VOCAB.</b> Filling in the blanks in a passage	



## APPENDIX 11

### GUIDELINES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR TEACHERS

#### NOTES FOR THE TEACHER

The following are some of the most important points to be observed in teaching the various subjects.

Conversation Reading and Recitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Articulation</li> <li>b) Pronunciation</li> <li>c) Fluency</li> <li>d) Phrasing</li> <li>e) Emphasis</li> <li>f) Modulation</li> <li>g) Intelligence, as shown by grasp of subject matter etc</li> <li>h) Presenting the poem as a whole</li> <li>i) Talking interesting conversation</li> <li>j) Don't weary the class with too much explanation</li> <li>k) Imagination: Drawing &amp; Composition</li> </ul>
Script and Handwriting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Adhesion to style adopted by the school</li> <li>b) Word spacing, letter spacing</li> <li>c) Simplicity, facility and speed</li> <li>d) Position of the body – eyes at least ten inches from the paper</li> <li>e) Holding of the pen</li> <li>f) Formation of individual letters\</li> <li>g) Size, uniformity of slope, etc</li> <li>h) Freedom and Character</li> </ul>
Spelling and Dictation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Accuracy in transcription</li> <li>b) Facility in taking down Dictation Exercise</li> <li>c) Knowledge of Rules</li> <li>d) Words similar in sound</li> <li>e) Anomalous words</li> <li>f) Clear and correct dictating</li> <li>g) Correct listening</li> <li>h) Correct punctuation</li> <li>i) Good and consistent marking</li> <li>j) Mistakes learnt – recapitulation</li> <li>k) Mistakes prevented – word-building</li> </ul>
Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Punctuation</li> <li>b) Structure of sentences</li> <li>c) Vocabulary</li> <li>d) Spelling</li> <li>e) Agreements (Grammar)</li> <li>f) Sequence and arrangement of matter</li> <li>g) Imagination</li> <li>h) Speed</li> </ul>
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Function of uses of words</li> <li>b) Formation of sentences</li> <li>c) Analysis of sentences</li> <li>d) Lessons based on collected and classified common errors in Composition</li> <li>e) Practical – An aid to composition</li> </ul>

## Transcription Conventions: Interviews

[	]	transcriber's addition to the text
...		short pause between utterances
P		principal
T1		teacher 1
T2		teacher 2
T3		teacher 3
SG1		student group 1
SG2		student group 2
SG3		student group 3
S1		individual, identified student
SS		general student response
<		talk overlaps at this point

## APPENDIX 12

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

#### INTERVIEW EXCERPTS : PRINCIPAL (P)

##### *Excerpt 1*

Well, if you mean whether it's [ English] a second language or first language, then I would say officially it's a second language. Academically, it's [ English] very important. Functionally, it's essential. You cannot do without English, in all academic subjects, as you know, especially from primary 4 onwards, many of the academic subjects, sometimes they call it Maths and Science subjects, are in English. Maths and Science in secondary, especially upper secondary, it will mean five or six subjects. And English is also for technology, computers, this is clear, in the secondary in particular, it's important.

##### *Excerpt 2*

Because English is the medium of instruction in so many subjects. So, from there, you can deduce what the word "status" ... but it is officially a second language. A second language should not be that important, actually, that's why I say, functionally, academically, it is number one, you can say.

##### *Excerpt 3*

My impression, what I see here [in this school] is that the approach is very traditional and very teacher-centred. Emphasis is on reading and writing. Reading comprehension skills, knowledge of grammar. That's a very common thing. Not sufficient emphasis on spoken skills or communicative skills.

##### *Excerpt 4*

But in terms of the examinations, including the Brunei-Cambridge Exams and so on, "O" levels, "A" levels, what is needed? Comprehension and the writing of essays. The oral is a very small part. You see, it's the exams that dictate the teachers, how to teach, what to teach. So, again here in question, I would say that the teachers' approach is very exam oriented. That's understandable. What are the exams? Grammar, essays. Not much oral. In the lower classes, I have seen also, not much. Asking questions, answering questions. They think that's spoken English. It's just a kind of roal, but it's not really spoken English. Spoken English should be spontaneous.

##### *Excerpt 5*

As I said, it [ this kind of teaching] produces exam results and parents want that. Children want that. They want their certificates. They want their grades, that's all. On the other hand, it could make English more interesting if they put a bit of more sort of real communication. But they will use their own language, their mother tongue. This is a disadvantage. When you have another language, you like to use the language you're more proficient in. So, briefly, that's what I think. I think they should balance it with the spoken aspect as well. Even the exams, perhaps, should be paying more attention to it.

##### *Excerpt 6*

I would think [ exams are] mainly for writing and reading comprehension skills. To promote mainly the writing skills, reading comprehension skills, and a knowledge of grammar.

##### *Excerpt 7*

So that skill is not being promoted in the classroom, I mean the spoken skills. With that oral exam, how much is that? Not much, not very much, very little, I would say. It is worldwide like in England when you teach French. How much does English people speak French? How well are they in spoken French? Very little. The environment is not there.

##### *Excerpt 8*

Whatever the exams require, the teachers will teach. That's why I said the teaching is very much exam oriented. Majority of teachers, that's the first thing they will do, if they have other types [of exams] maybe they will do something else.

##### *Excerpt 9*

I've said exam is as important as other things – sports and so on. And also your spoken language. Well, I call it a necessary evil. I know it's hard. It's a necessary evil. It's an evil we can't do away with. It's a worldwide thing. Is there any school in any part of the world that has done away with exams? May be not. The emphasis is high, you see. It's something very difficult to avoid.



*Excerpt 10*

[The school expects students to] do well in the written exams, English and subjects in English. Do well in the written exams, that is English language itself and subjects in English language. If they're not good in English, they will not do well in other subjects as well. And also, acquire the reading and reading comprehension skills and also the writing skills. It's also an extension of all skills,

*Excerpt 11*

They [ students] realise it's [ a knowledge of English] an educational outlet. Further studies and even within our own university.

*Excerpt 12*

Of course, they [ teachers] do make mistakes. All will be careless mistakes, but English is not their first language. Even first language speakers make mistakes. But what we aim for in this situation is the target of the educated ones, the English spoken by the educated ones. That would be the standard. Yah, beside that point, I would say also what we hope to achieve is I hope that a high percentage of students can go to tertiary and university education, locally or abroad where English is used. That's the standard we think we'd like to prepare the students for.

*Excerpt 13*

[a good language class] Besides covering things for the exam, it also caters for functional needs. That is the social needs. That itself will help children to read and write better. In fact, if the oral or spoken language are doing well, they will do better in the other skills.

*Excerpt 14*

[a good English classroom] Relaxed, and there's no fear in asking anything. At the same time, they respect the teacher. They follow, they behave themselves. They might joke, have a few laughs, that's o.k. The teacher is to be relaxed and very tolerant. Democracy should be practised. Not so authoritative. Many teachers are. I would say in one short sentence – a good classroom will touch on all these major skills., spoken, reading and writing. And at the same time, will fulfil the exam needs. There's no point being able to speak very well, but not being able to write. Writing is very different. You've got to learn the structure, the grammar, to spell. You may know how to say, but not spell it.

*Excerpt 15*

There is a traditional practice in Brunei where the exams, either mid-year exams or end-of-the-year exams or public exams carrying so much weight. Parents also take so much weight on that, seriously on that, so the teachers and the school cannot simply ignore that. So I would think at least half or slightly more than half the time will be on the parents' wishes, the education ministry's policies and what available time we have, we can manipulate, we will take into this communicative approach language teaching which I'm very familiar with. But in the actual teaching in the classroom, I have not observed many yet in the school itself. I intend to do so, and I think , as I told you earlier, I believe the majority are still very traditional. Traditional does not necessary mean wrong or obsolete. It means very conventional and very unchanged. Obviously, children's behaviour change, society has changed, community has changed. Technology changes things. So if the teacher does not change entirely, still like say in the 60s, I think they need to change, to some extent. As I said, tradition is not necessarily totally wrong. To me traditional values and ways can be very useful. It will not go out for a long time. But here, in a lot of ways, it is used for academic purposes. You know, that's a very big thing you've got to bear in mind. We try to do it for academic purposes as well as for communicative purposes, two goals.

*Excerpt 16*

To begin with, I think a good language class is a class that would answer the needs of the students. The needs of the students of the various language skills, the spoken skills, listening skills, the reading and writing skills. All that must be in. How they achieve that is another matter. That's where "good" or "bad" comes in, where the students' views come in. If you could be more democratic, the students are entertained, and the students feel that they are contributing, not being dictated to or directed by the teacher all the time. They have a question to ask, they want to divert a little, they're allowed to. I think that these are some of the elements. Traditional teaching does not allow for diversion. The teacher has a planned lesson and he intends to finish it in that half an hour or that hour and would not tolerate people coming in and diverting it and as a result. Half of his lesson or a quarter of his lesson is not completed. He gets very upset. You know, that is a very traditional way and that's a bad lesson, I think. That the teacher is not flexible. It's too much teacher-centred, I think.

*Excerpt 17*

The mentality of the teachers, to begin with. The teachers are very used to this way. In the lower classes, in primary, I've already asked students to be arranged in groups or like a group, rather than a row. The teachers were not too receptive of this, not too receptive. I think they do not know this. They're so much trained and practiced in the traditional way. To bring in a new idea is difficult. I remember in the language teaching approach, our project, we require that lower classes be arranged all in groups. Now, secondary classes. Now, it's also again the teachers' approach to language teaching. When we talk about this, they say it's unthinkable.

*Excerpt 18*

When we say remedial, they [the English language teachers] take the whole class. Too big! They're teaching as usual. You see, the teachers have no idea what remedial teaching is. Individual coaching. They have a different understanding. You cannot teach the bright ones the same as the weaker ones. The language is different, the approach is different. The bright ones follow very quickly. They have better imagination perhaps. The less bright ones need to be more concrete based, be it science or language.

*Excerpt 19*

Very briefly, bring a principal is the leader of the school. He's also a monitor, evaluator. He's also a director, if you like. He's a director, a guider. He's a facilitator. A monitor, I've already mentioned. He monitors. He must have a system of monitoring the whole school. He doesn't just delegate it to another. He must know what's going on. He must get feedback all the time from these people he delegated work to. Now, he's a model, if you like. Now, I talk about sports. I conduct sports meetings and so on and so you're required to play in the field to show that you're interested, even if you are not interested, you can attend. I go to nearly all when I find time. I find it encourages the teachers and also students and I even take part in it. Recently, our sports day, there was an event for house masters mixed relay. In order to tell the children, house masters are not just house masters. They can also run. They're also good in sports. I mean, this is an example. And there are also a lot of other things. Whatever you think the teachers need to do, the principal needs to know at least. If he doesn't have to do it, he needs to know, so that he can be as far as possible, also step into the shoes of his teachers so that he can see better. I go into kindergarten for example. Some kindergarten teachers think a principal is somebody for only the secondary school. When I was school supervisor in the university, I take on classes, government schools. When I was head of teaching practice, I did the same thing. Also, I don't have a particular student to supervise. I supervise wherever I go. I go to all the schools that I can to talk to the principal. He's a public relations officer with parents outside, if you like. It's very much on that. Parents will want to see him. Some are afraid to see him. I don't know for whatever reason. They come to see the teacher only and don't come to see the principal. I pronounce it and say I'm the chief executive. If there's any serious problem, if you cannot get on with the teacher, you come and see me.

*Excerpt 20*

There will always be tempted pressure. Whether you feel it, what degree, it depends on how comfortable you're at the job. How capable are you in answering their complaints or judge their complaints. If you're able to answer it and convince them, the pressure will not be there. You achieve. If you're unable to answer, constantly, they come back to you because they're not satisfied with your answer. You've not solved the problem. Then the pressure is on.

*Excerpt 21*

Public relations officer, if you like [principal's job]. Very much so. If anything goes wrong between the teacher and students finally it reaches the head. That's why I said, signing anything, if signing anything unusual, should be done by the principal, not anybody else. He has to lead in many things. Leadership not necessarily started by him, it could be provoked by the teachers. And if it's good, he will discuss and reach a consensus, then go ahead with it.

*Excerpt 22*

I think in some schools, some classes, some teachers [teachers play a dominant role in the classroom]. Adhoc, it's adhoc. It's doing that. You cannot blame teachers for not changing from teacher-centred teaching to student-centred learning. So, it very much depends on the teacher in question here actually. They might try to copy and copy wrongly. But if implemented wrongly, it could be disastrous.

*Excerpt 23*

We have said exams to an extent dictate the teacher's behaviour. The teacher is at the mercy of the exams. Even though they may not agree, they have to fulfil the exam requirements first. The exam requirements

usually dictate teachers in their teaching. We want more grammar, more reading skills, writing skills. The teacher pushes more of that rather than spoken communicative skill, which is not examined, or doesn't carry much weight. So the curriculum, meaning the materials and the policies, the content and assessments will really handicap the teacher. But still, the teacher can do something. If not how I wanted all the time, it could be more students centred. Student centred does not necessarily affect the curriculum needs. Simply, it sort of reduces it, that's all, reduces the teacher-centred approach. You need to be a democratic teacher to be student-centred. If you are an authoritarian type, you are not student-centred. You're more like teacher-centred. Teacher knows everything, an egocentric teacher. Personality comes into your teaching too.

*Excerpt 24*

The research [this study], well, it is an area that not many people have looked at perhaps and very relevant to language teaching and learning. One has got to perhaps look into the more practical aspects of it. What is feasible, what is not feasible, what is theoretical but not practical. One should centre more on the practical aspects. No doubt, the theoretical aspects can come in. To me, theory is just philosophical. Philosophy may not be feasible sometimes, but it helps to guide you. It sets your mental attitude towards an issue or problem or phenomenon.

INTERVIEW EXCERPTS: T1 (TEACHER 1)

*Excerpt 1*

So, totally, it's about twenty-three years [ of teaching experience]. I mean I've been teaching in colleges here and there, but just temporarily. So teaching as such will be about twenty-three years.

*Excerpt 2*

I think a better foundation of grammatical and semantics as such instead of just learning theoretically. When you put it into practice you go deeper into it and now you know what should be said and what shouldn't be said, how to put your grammar in the right perspective. This means you're very sure of your grammar and application. So that's the main part. The correct usage of grammar. And you see now, when people speak, they have a lot of mistakes in their grammar. They always make these mistakes, 'he have, you don't know' and then like even this pronoun, so you say 'he's stronger than me'. They say spokenwise, you can accept it, but you try telling them 'he's taller than I am'. And you know, people who teach English and yet they go up and they make such mistakes. See. So it's strange ... I mean that I have learnt a lot I usage such and I'm very careful with how I use the language with my students. So I've learnt a lot in grammar, relative pronouns, possessive pronouns.

*Excerpt 3*

I have learnt that this is important [ grammar teaching]. Because the rule of teaching us hard to absorb. when you put it to the students, sometimes the students will say, 'teacher, I think you're wrong.' So when I say 'you are learning the wrong way'. So when they say, 'is that so?' then you tell it to them and they're able to grasp. And they're willing to learn. I mean that's the best part of the students here or maybe I have a better rapport with them, I don't know. But so far what I say, they seem to assimilate. They have confidence in me.

*Excerpt 4*

They're [students] weak at ... actually they're weak at in-depth study. They always want to just go on a superficial level. They do not want to go deeper to get more knowledge as such, you know. Most of them ... of course you have the very good ones who make an attempt to learn new words, to apply new words. There are certain pupils you just give them the work, they accept it, they take it, they do it as work and then they give it back to you. When you ask them, 'why don't you use it in composition as such and comprehension?' they said, 'I know no way of using these words'. They are quite happy with very simple words and very simple idiomatic way of expressing themselves. So when it comes to expression as such, they don't seem able to use better vocabulary.

*Excerpt 5*

Mainly because of the lack of reading. Or maybe because when you give them all the exercises, they take it, they use it, but they take it as it is. They are more influenced by what the current language is. And I don't think nowadays they use a lot of difficult words, for instance. Mostly you go by one or two words. And one word covers everything, you see, so they go by that kind of

expressions like using “guys” for everything and using “stuff,” “your stuff, my stuff” and maybe because of this computer thing. They do not want to go

into reading or sit down and read. Now o.k. I ... some of the girls actually go into reading romance. I suppose in a way, I may not be right, but I think at least they read something, isn't it, somehow? And I find that these weak students who have started reading these books, there is some kind of focus. At least there is a little bit of structure in their composition.

*Excerpt 6*

I'm quite good at teaching. Because I'm very comfortable and I know what I teach is relevant. So when I teach, of course, I don't have many textbooks. I just go with my own examples, my own sentences, then I try to pick out sentences which they would use and things like that, for example: “Debbie is wearing a blue shirt. She looks very good in it”. So I ask them “can you join the sentences using a pronoun?”

*Excerpt 7*

like we have 5 days in a week and so on Monday I'll give them grammar. And then on Tuesday I'll either give them a composition or comprehension. Or if they are not really in the mood to write, I'll give them debate or brainstorming. Just ask them to come out ... I'll just throw a topic to them and say, “if you're in a mood to talk, come here and I'll give you something to do” when we have a block period. And then on a Wednesday, I'll give them vocabulary. Then Thursday, I'll go back to grammar, giving them sentences and finding out the oddities

*Excerpt 8*

I don't think so. I don't approve [ whole language teaching]. Especially in the younger classes. They must be told, what is agreement? What is article? I feel they should be told. Because when they come to secondary, you take it for granted. Alright. So a fellow will stand up and say, “teacher, the girl which I saw...” I say the girl is not a dog. Why do you keep on saying “which”? So when you ask them relative pronouns, they will say, ‘we've never heard’ although the teacher might have told, the teacher might have taught. It is just that, I don't know, I may be wrong. They just say the teacher will say, ‘o.k. just fill in the blanks/. So they do not know. So, every time when I teach relative pronouns, they always stand up and ask me, “when do I use who? When do I use which?” That is very often. And then the other one is the verb phrase. So I asked them, “why didn't you learn this in the lower classes?” “We did exercises and that's it.” So that is a little upsetting.

*Excerpt 9*

Yes, because I enjoy it. I like it [ teaching English as discrete parts]

*Excerpt 10*

Maybe it depends on the classes. My 4S1 I think they may not be too bad. My 5B, I think they're beyond ... my 1B is o.k. I terrorize them because I've never taught Form 1 classes. And this time all the Form 5 teachers are asked to teach Form 1. So they get forty of them. They tend to be very noisy, so if you don't put your foot down, they become unruly. Because I was told 1G is quite active. My class could be active. Maybe. I don't give them a chance. I know when I teach, I give them things – jokes and all that and they do laugh. They do roar with laughter and all that. But when you ask them questions, they become very quiet. The ones who're good talk, but they talk and they make mistakes. So, in a way, maybe they're quite intimidated.

*Excerpt 11*

Limitations no. Pressure, yes. Pressure in the sense of examination results. There's always ... maybe it's an Asian concept in this part of the world. Everything depends on exam results. D sometimes, for languages, you see, the same teacher can handle a science class and she can produce thirty over distinctions. The same teacher will handle an arts class and get three or four. So it is more the students' work as well as their capacity, their capabilities. So, you cannot say, o.k.

you're not a good teacher because that is one thing you always get ... the school recognises that too. Some, they do, but sometimes they think oh no, you should have put in more effort, but they know because the students who fail English usually fail in all subjects. Or what happens is, like some of the students who come from the Chinese schools. They do very well in all subjects. When it comes to English, they cannot. It's not that they cannot try, it's just that the way they think and the way they express themselves sort of contradicts ... especially where grammar is concerned. So there they're quite happy to come out with a C6, but then it reflects badly. Everything's a distinction, only your English

*Excerpt 12*

But if you ask me, exams are important. But then you mustn't judge the teacher based on exams. You look at the students' general performance, and then you strike a happy balance

*Excerpt 13*

For example, if you want me to tell them to do a communicative activity, like when we were in Malaysia. When they want to ... us to write about the sea, they take us to the seaside. And then you sit there. And then you look around your left and right and then you come back again. What have you seen? So that's o.k. But you can't here. Even to get the children out of the classroom, I don't think we can. So when you want to be very creative, when you want to do something different, your hands are tied, because our system is a very rigid system. Time? Time, o.k. Even if you ask your students, "o.k.let's go another day", getting parents' permission, getting transportation. Students are involved in so many things, particularly tuition, maybe or maybe not, we just don't know. So, these things, these things if we could have a chance to take them out to do things, those they will enjoy. This is always like chalk and talk. This is it, I talk and talk

*Excerpt 14*

To a certain extent [ teachers talk too much]. You want everything going across to them, that's the writing and so forth.

*Excerpt 15*

You try to relate them to what you have taught. I mean language is free expression, isn't it? When they talk, you're listening to what they've got to say, their ideas and their viewpoints. It's better like that. That's an ideal class. Maybe for all subjects but particularly in English because you're telling them, o.k. this is what is expected of you and if they can put these things back to us, that itself is rewarding, isn't it?

*Excerpt 16*

A good English student is one who reads well, who writes well, who knows what she's doing, is able to converse well.

*Excerpt 17*

Listening activities ...no ... I hardly ever use them, unless there's a passage particularly you like. Most of those types of listening conversations that ... sitting there with your partner and talk about autobiographies and so on. I just think that one, there isn't enough time and then secondly, don't think it's going to be very useful as such. I'd rather go in for re-expressions and vocabulary where they're using word formation and re-expressing the sentence structure because you're still keeping to the examination format.

*Excerpt 18*

Comprehension, composition, grammar, vocabulary. Most of these [ are most useful]

*Excerpt 19*

I think the classes today are more enjoyable. I don't know, but we seem to learn more than what they're learning today. And I think we're more stoic then. I don't remember us being such chatterboxes or trying to get round to teachers in other ways. We never used to be so personal with our teachers. I mean I think, they're o.k. Students should be more serious about their work .. in their academic studies. Our children here, maybe depending on the teacher, but towards me at least, to a certain extent, some of them are very friendly. They just come to talk about certain things. I don't reprimand them, even if they say something rude. I don't think I'd be that friendly to my teacher.

*Excerpt 20*

We tend to get lazy by giving them lots of written work. Written work first to make sure they get their past tense and past continuous. How else can I know that they know what they're doing?

*Excerpt 21*

Yes, oral. Sometimes they can come up with "give us an example of..." you ask one fellow. By the time you ask the next chap would have got the information from another guy. Especially as they're sitting so close together. Anything's possible. If you tell them to do written work and you are supervising then very vigilantly, then maybe you'll get their true colours. Once you give it as homework, you'll never know. But the majority of my students ... you can trust that it's their own work, because it comes back equally bad.

*Excerpt 22*

As you see, English language ... we're not going strictly by the syllabus. We have the examination format. You make sure that for F5 you have a comprehension and composition, no grammar. But to answer comprehension questions, you need grammar.

*Excerpt 23*

That they [the administrators] just want to see that the standard of English is maintained. By the results. Mostly it's the results. Of course, it's the competitions, the debate etc. When the students are good, they think the teachers have done a good job. Where external competitions are concerned, they expect a lot

*Excerpt 24*

Of course [observed by the administrators]. I mean, they do pass by. I'm sure they're aware of how the class is being controlled and what you're doing most of the time. So, even if they may not come in and visit. They do when there's a renewal of contract etc. But I suppose when you're walking past the class, you don't simply walk without looking into the classroom. If possible you want to see what's happening, how students are reacting to the teacher.

*Excerpt 25*

Especially when you feel that the students may not meet the requirements, then you feel a bit inadequate. Language exams they take seriously because many of them have aspirations to go overseas. So they're very particular. I think they are. But whether they have outside tuition, I do not know. Generally, they're very particular about English because it's a passport to overseas and they feel that wherever they go, they need the language.

*Excerpt 26*

Like some of them [the students] still have not got a better command of the grammar.

*Excerpt 27*

I think the students will be very happy if they can grasp what you're saying. They can understand what you're trying to tell them and that they can follow. I think that is more ... sometimes if you use too big, bombastic a word, they get confused and it looks as if the teacher is merely showing off her vocabulary rather than getting through to her students

*Excerpt 28*

Very informal, very casual [my teaching style]. It's only now and then that I go into very formal English

teaching as such where certain grammar, certain parts of grammar requires that you put them in their places and make them listen so that certain matters are sort of drilled into them. Informal meaning I do not go prepared with any set rules as such. Alright, today is comprehension. So for comprehension, there is a passage. So before you start on a passage, maybe you talk about something relevant to the topic. And then slowly you bring into them. So in that way you're not actually ... you read the passage and from there you deviate and then you come back. So you can go off to ordinary relationships, everyday things. So it is not fact and you go strictly by what you have. Formal means you go there with your charts and your other materials and teaching aids, and then you make them sit down there and say, "o.k. this is what you're going to do and prepositions, you fill in this and that way". You teach what has to be taught and then ask them, "alright now you do the exercise" and that is over. So, you're not actually interacting with the students.

*Excerpt 29*

It is different. The atmosphere is different. And even every year, your methods have to change because you're looking at human beings, individual students. So you cannot have a stick-in-the-mud method that you go by every year, year in year out. So what influences me I suppose is the classroom atmosphere. It is how the students react. So you change accordingly, or you adapt accordingly

*Excerpt 30*

Definitely where there is a lot of give and take [in a well-run English classroom]. A lot of communication between the teacher and pupils. When the teacher says something, there must be immediate and a very good response from the students. So a lot of communication. There should be a good response from the pupils. And the teacher must also feel that she's reaching out to the students.

*Excerpt 31*

It has happened, o.k. [students who try to become personal with teachers] I won't say that it is not good. Again, it goes on an individual basis. Some of them are trying to be precocious. I think I wouldn't encourage it. Trying to be you know, I know it all, I want to be your good friend because I feel it is good for my image. That kind of thing, I don't think I will encourage. But if a child is sincere, then I don't mind if the students try to be personal. As long as I know my limitations and her limitations. Because now I have my former students coming back to me. We go out, we get together. So, of course I don't tell them you address me as Z[teacher's first name] or anything. That is there but we can get along on one to one as a peer. I can talk certain things. Whatever they talk about I can relate myself to that. First of all, we may not have the time to entertain them. Secondly, I think it is not very wise to get very personally involved with the students, in case they misunderstand and they try to take advantage. They might think, 'alright, the teacher is so friendly that I can get away with doing my homework. Maybe the teacher won't mind.' So they shouldn't have that kind of attitude. So it's always better to keep them at a distance. But after your period is over and they hi you and they want to talk to you about certain thing, I think that's o.k. Because some students do approach me, so I do not shun them. But at the same time I do not want to go into their problems with the family. You never know what you'll get into. We wouldn't want to put them also into a difficult situation.

*Excerpt 32*

Yes [I would discourage a personal relationship with my students]. Unless it is very traumatic. The maybe, if there is some kind of help that can be given, then maybe ... depends on the situation.

*Excerpt 33*

Oh, to know that when you go into a class, you have got something mentally prepared [on writing lesson notes]. So that ... we simply don't go there and give a blank look. So at the back of your mind, you have something, whether you are able to put that into your teaching for that particular

day is a different matter. To have a proper sequence to your work. If you do this today, tomorrow there'll be something to follow up on. It give you a more planned perspective.

*Excerpt 34*

I think so [writing lesson plans]. It gives you, tells you what to do. I mean you have sort of planned or prepared to face the class with something

*Excerpt 35*

If we keep on giving too much freedom to students where are we going to stand? That means you are asking them, 'what do you want to choose? What do you want me to do?' You are giving them so much of power. They'll manipulate you. Why not you take a stand and say, 'oh, this is what I want you to do, this is what we should do.' So you're telling them rather than they being so undecided. We're talking about very young children

*Excerpt 36*

O.K. F4 and F5. Again, it depends on your syllabus, what they're supposed to do. usually in language classrooms, aren't we taking the needs of the students into consideration? So where language, English language is concerned, I don't think many students will come out and say this is so totally irrelevant to what I want to learn. Whatever you tell them, whatever you give them, they are willing to accept. Because they feel the course of language learning is so vast. Anything and everything can be accepted. I mean I don't see any way that students will have to have a say in what they learn. Ours is already geared to their needs

*Excerpt 37*

I think so [that teachers should take the main role]. Because our students are rather, our youngsters nowadays are pretty confused. They don't seem to know what they want and I given too much of liberty, too much of freedom, they might not know where they're going. I mean, look at our children. We have to guide them, so why not we go by the same method of teaching?

*Excerpt 38*

For years. It has changed. Those days, the teacher was the law. Whatever he said was accepted. Nowadays it is not so. Children stand up and they do argue. They do say, 'you are not right'. And I would also accept my pupil standing up to say, 'teacher, I think your sentence is wrong' or 'I think this is not correct. Why can't it be this way?' So, I've been giving them a certain freedom in that respect. I mean, you are not correct all the time. You should also be broad-minded. We can be wrong. The student can be right.

*Excerpt 39*

The good ones [students] always talk. The quiet ones always remain quiet. That's because they're either shy by nature or they're reserved by nature or they agree to whatever is being said. They feel they've got nothing to contribute.

*Excerpt 40*

Oh yes. They like it [groupwork] very much. Almost all of them. Because they're enthusiastic. They ask for it every time you go in. And I suppose it's one way of getting out of writing, getting out of sitting there and listening and getting away from homework. Because when they're preparing, maybe one or two of them might prepare or they can just simply sit together and somebody talks or they talk and somebody just jots down the points. And then when they're having a good discussion, they sort of put it together. So they don't actually do much work as such unless in debates, then the individual participants have to work and gather material.

*Excerpt 41*

No. I don't think we [language teachers] co-ordinate at all. Because our English exam papers is totally different from what is being taught in class. There is comprehension, composition, grammar. It's a hotch-potch. So a teacher is expected to teach all these. When the exam comes, it's a mixture of everything.



*Excerpt 42*

It's hard to say because each one is left on her own to her own. You work out your own method, your own system and at the end of the day, you're facing the same paper. If the student is able to apply herself to the paper, where is the complaint? Each teacher knows what he/she is doing and we are all comfortable that we're doing our work. Because I might teach relative pronouns this week, another teacher might teach it the following term. Ultimately, it is covered. Because our system does not ask for specific grammar, relative pronouns, passive voice. No. It's the comprehension and question skills, passage, tenses, filling in the blanks.

*Excerpt 43*

It has sort of penetrated through that there should be no failures and I think that's not fair. You cannot have an institution without failures and just because you want to please someone. I don't think you should help them to pass. That is my personal feeling.

*Excerpt 44*

But don't you think that it depends on the teacher as well? Some teachers may have a knack of getting to the pupils, some of them are standoffish. Generally, I think it is good. I don't find any teacher being segregated from the students.

*Excerpt 45*

I feel that our system is very rigid. We just push them on and on to do work and work and work. Their creativity is not developed. I mean, take them out of the classroom, take them out for a walk.

*Excerpt 46*

Oh yes [I have suggested to the administration]. It hasn't been received well. It's not practical. If you really want to, there are ways to overcome. But from the rules, they say, no, it is not possible. Then you don't think about it anymore.

INTERVIEW EXCERPTS : T2 (TEACHER 2)

*Excerpt 1*

More than 20 years. I still go back to some of the traditional ways, like grammar teaching. I know, grammar, the new method is usually you allow them to talk, isn't it? I find it easier to teach them the way my teachers taught me, where they explain more thoroughly why you write this way. And I find that it helps, even though they say that it's a traditional way and now you don't teach it that way. You're supposed to teach it through communication and they learn through familiarity and all that. But in our situation... I don't know ...don't know why it doesn't work.... that's the thing... I'm trying to figure out why. In their written performance. It doesn't come out they way you want it. The tenses are still wrong

*Excerpt 2*

And it's easier to teach them (grammar teaching). O.K. this is present tense. You teach them the grammar. Rather than familiarity... let them talk... it doesn't work, not in their writing, not in their writing. But it's more boring, you know, on the students. Because it's more the teacher talking, you see, in the class, the parts of speech.

*Excerpt 3*

Composition. Actually, composition, I like to do more of interactive work and more of them doing something than just writing. Sometimes, it's difficult, like, you give them a topic, and then you discuss something and then ask them to work. Sometimes it's good but sometimes they do not know what they have to write, you see.

*Excerpt 4*

To me, I prefer it [dividing lessons into discrete parts such as grammar, composition etc]. It seems to be more systematic. That's the reason why once we have our time-table, I will sort of allocate, oh today is grammar, vocabulary... it isn't jumbled up. That's my method. I find it more systematic, more organized

*Excerpt 5*

Communicative. In a way, communicative. But they need the written work as well. And they have to get their grammar right. Actually, if you look at Brunei, sometimes, it's not so much the teaching, it's more correcting. And it's so ingrained in them. I think at home they speak that way, you see...

*Excerpt 6*

No [to groupwork activities]. The size. Partly the size.

*Excerpt 7*

Actually, they are too early, like the 1<sup>st</sup> assessment, I think is in February. We haven't covered anything, that assessment. To me, it's not a proper test. It's just a very slipshod test. If you want a proper test, you must have covered certain aspects and then test them, and then properly conducted. But here it's a bit slipshod. And then the third assessment test was too soon after the mid-year exam. So, first assessment, third assessment, actually we... we didn't do a good job. And fourth at least in between, we had covered more already and then we included some project work, you see

*Excerpt 8*

Well, we have grammar [assessment]... we try but usually we do more than the PMB. Because the exam paper for PMB is ... quite simple, you know to cover 1 ½ hours. And usually the children finish well before the time, so in order to occupy them, to use up the 1 ½ hr more thoroughly, we usually set more. We try to follow the format of PMB, but then we add in more

*Excerpt 9*

Because they have 2 exams, the mid-year and final. Then maybe 2 more assessments, one before the... somewhere before the mid-year and then one between the mid-year and finals. I think that should be enough

*Excerpt 10*

Just to see whether what they have done is right. But English actually is cross-curriculum. Because I heard some of the subject teachers saying that, "you know, these students can't even describe er... the science teachers also complain, the geography teachers also complain, the history teachers also complain... a lot of them are not using what they've learnt...

*Excerpt 11*

Sometimes I wonder... but for essays, it's O.K. Composition writing, sometimes essays is good. You see how they can write, you see, and maybe, well an exam is also good because if students know that there is no exam, they'll never study, you see. And so, in that way, we encourage them to also try to learn the subject well, the language.

*Excerpt 12*

They think exams are very important... partly to get high marks. The school will be number one and two. Of course, it reflects well when the school does well. Especially in exam classes [pressure in teaching]. In non-exam classes, we're more relaxed

*Excerpt 13*

Yah, in a sense. It [the exams] sort of conveys the message to the students that it is important. Otherwise, you know, especially nowadays, maybe in the past, it was not so bad, you see. Now there are more distractions again...

*Excerpt 14*

Actually, I prefer streamed classes. But then of course this will bring out the psychological side of it. Limitations, I find ... lack of space, maybe the limited resources, so we can't do a lot. When the children are not responsive. They don't answer freely. They're very reluctant. I think they don't want to be laughed at in case they get it wrong. Basically, I think it's that. But when it comes to individually answering... it's very difficult.

*Excerpt 15*

Well, if you wait for a volunteer, it'll take ages. Yah, actually we did. Once, I waited one whole period. I told them, "until I get someone to answer, I'll wait." And really, it took one period. They had to nudge someone to answer to save them. So it's faster to call on someone. And then sometimes, you call a certain person, sort of to give each a chance, they won't answer. So you have to call a second one. Sometimes, you can call, but that person will still not answer. Like, I have some good students, but sometimes, you call them to answer, they won't answer.

*Excerpt 16*

Maybe he doesn't know the answer. Maybe he doesn't want to. You know, these children, they love to laugh at people. When they themselves don't know the answer, horrible. 3G, surprisingly, I have no problem with that class. Oh they love to talk. They talk more than they should, surprisingly. But it's a good class. I think that's the difference. I think there's a difference between a good class and...

*Excerpt 17*

It's nice and it's difficult too [teaching English at the secondary level]. Because of the ... mainly because of the vocabulary. You have to use quite simple words, especially with the present F2. These students have gone through the Dwibahasa. So their vocabulary is much simpler than previous years

*Excerpt 18*

I don't like it [my teaching style] ... I'm very frank with you. I don't like it because ... It's more chalk, talk, blackboard, you know. I think I would prefer the students to talk more, to participate more. There's no other style for that kind of setting, I think.

*Excerpt 19*

The children are too much spoonfed and it's very hard for them to get out of that situation. I try to get them to do a bit of work on their own, especially the library when you ask them to read, do some research, find out some information and share with the class. Sometimes, I ask them to sort of find information and then sort of test their classmates. To get them to do some things where they can, you know, not rely so much on the teacher.

*Excerpt 20*

Maybe, but very slowly [student-centred classrooms]. Because for the other subjects they're still being spoonfed, you see. So it's to a very small degree.

*Excerpt 21*

To a certain extent, it does [teaching style]. I think for the weaker students it works. But for the better students, it is boring. Because I think they would like to do more things on their own and

that's why I can see the difference between my F3 class and my F2. My F3 enjoys English more than F2 because they get to do a lot of things on their own. They conduct interviews among themselves, they ...

*Excerpt 22*

There must be a limit to that also. It's good to sometimes, you know, get them to suggest, but I think, the final say has still to come from the teacher. So that there's more order and there's a system going on. I do that actually. I ask my class to write letters to me. I don't ask them to do orally, that'll be too much. I ask them to write letters to me and give their suggestions and tell them I'll read and see what can be carried out, what cannot.

*Excerpt 23*

When I plan [regarding lesson plans], actually in my mind, I have what I want to specify, the main thing that I have to bring up even as I work out ... and because we're so used to it already. I think year in and year out. We have already at the back of our minds what we want to do. Oh, that [weekly lesson plans] is mainly for office checking, that we are doing some work. So, one is to complete the syllabus. So we need to follow to a certain extent. But even while trying to complete the syllabus, we also have in mind, you know, to see how they can accomplish that bit of topic.

*Excerpt 24*

And then I know exactly what I'm doing, you see. If there's no planning, or example, comes to school, look through some textbooks, now what am I going to teach. It's more of a systematic way of going about things

*Excerpt 25*

I think when they can pass their exams. Or this school, we need to see them passing their exams [what works well for her]. A lot of exercises, basically. To a certain extent. And you can see that even though some do well for exams, they don't speak well. So that part is harder, actually. To bring some of them to talk and speak they can only sort of convey in writing but not in oral.

*Excerpt 26*

Basically, we can do only during reading comprehension [oral aspect]. We get some of them to read passages, listen to them. That's about the only way that some of them will ever get to open up, you see.

*Excerpt 27*

Some do, some don't [like group work]. Yah. You always have a group that never hands in their projects, so you know that they don't like it. And some enjoy it. But most, I would say, most of them enjoy doing group work.

*Excerpt 28*

When the students can write [view of a well-run English classroom]. When the children can communicate. When they're happy to communicate and not shy away when asked to talk. I always ... because knowing the children nowadays, they have a lot to talk about, and some of them are not related to what we want them to talk about. Sometimes I give them a topic. And then they're supposed to talk only on that topic. Give ideas, pros and cons. Once I did situations. I got them into groups first, and then gave them the situations and every group has to come up with 5 responses, reactions, so they enjoy that. Because they don't have to do written work. They don't quite like written work. They prefer to talk.

*Excerpt 29*

I don't really like that [students getting personal with teachers]. I want them to know that there's still ... you know, the difference between a student and the teacher. because I think some of the children do get beyond. They talk too easily and too ... they're too familiar with the teachers. And I don't like the way they ... it will be difficult, later on, in the classroom itself when it comes to discipline. They look at you too much as a friend. So, I do maintain a distance. You can talk to me anytime you want... you can be friendly, but it has to stop somewhere.

*Excerpt 30*

Yah, with me they are. And they will never talk to me in Hokkien (a local dialect). Like they do with some teachers – dialects. I never give them that opportunity, so once they overheard me talking in Hokkien to another teacher and they told me, "teacher, this is the first time we heard you talking in Hokkien."

*Excerpt 31*

One [a good English language student] who can write. One who can communicate. One who has no problem in getting the other party understand what they want. And usually you find that those good at their language usually, I would say, are better students overall.

*Excerpt 32*

I think for weak classes, it's true. It's very teacher dominated partly because the students themselves do not want to talk. In the first place, they don't feel confident to talk, you see. So they are shy to stand up. They are shy to give opinions thinking that they might be laughed at or that their opinions are of no importance, you know. But for a good class, I think it can be more students centred where the teachers play a minimal role, just guiding them, advising them, telling them what are the things they could improve on. But they're quite capable in doing things. So, for teacher dominated classes, they're usually the weak classes. Some, I think yah. I believe that teachers convey what they know, but I think teachers can stand to be corrected. I think so, if the student is good, and if s/he points out the mistake.

*Excerpt 33*

Well, I have ... my F3s have argued with me over certain issues. Well, I take it in good humour. I accept ... for me, I'm open. If the class is good, I usually allow them to correct me and to speak out because I see that that's the only way both of us learn and for that child it means something. Weaker classes. That seldom happens. I don't think they even know whether there's a mistake or not. And they're quite happy to sit and receive ... yah. They prefer that. They're so scared to be singled out, I think, to talk, to answer. But for the good class, like the F3, they enjoy it.

*Excerpt 34*

I think in most cases [teachers talk too much]. It's not wrong, but I think with the changing times, students also change and sometimes I think they have their ideas and as adults I think we can listen to them. Because some of them do have good ideas and from them we learn actually, because they see things so differently.

## INTERVIEW EXCERPTS : T3 (TEACHER 3)

*Excerpt 1*

...what I do in the classrooms here is, I mean, I couldn't cater to that aspect because they do not have the general reading habits. So, here I find we hardly do the real aspect of language. You know what I mean? It is only for ... the main objective, the 'O' levels, say here, is to meet the child's proficiency in this language, in the sense, he can communicate properly with the other person, understand what the other is speaking to him. This is what we make them, you know, qualify them in. And of course, the written part, we train them for continuous writing in Paper 1. So we are groomed for only 1 paper, that is continuous writing. Paper 2, that is reading comprehension. Comprehension papers are the ones they find difficult because of their poor reading habits.

*Excerpt 2*

As you saw, I have 40 students in each class and I have only 35 minutes at my disposal in which I'm expected to complete my syllabus too. It's not that because it is English, so we do not have a syllabus... the school does not... here so far, But I personally try to follow a syllabus of my own in the sense that even at 'O' levels they would be familiar with 3500 words, that is my aim

*Excerpt 3*

So, with the point of view of the 'O' level examinations, all the passages set for them are of much, much higher standard. And what I found the problem here in Brunei, you see, will be catering to Brunei students. Cambridge is not at fault, because maybe Brunei ministry has asked them to regulate it according to their needs. So that is why the, you know... so what I find is the jump from PMB to F4 is too defined a jump, too defined a jump. Suddenly when they come in to F4 they're not exposed to that kind of level. And again when they come to 'O' level, or F4, they're just trying to grasp, grasp, grasp. I mean, they're just surfing around. F5, they're still not prepared with their textbook to face the 'O' level paper, comprehension especially

*Excerpt 4*

Two papers. That's why most of them do not think that teaching of grammar is important. I belong to the very old school of thought, and experience has taught me when I teach them functional grammar, very technically, they understand. They understand, they pick up very fast. But again my drawback, the drawback that I face is, they do not apply this grammar, what they gained from me, they do not apply this in their written work. So I have to, each time, try to lead and show them, see why do I teach you this grammar? It's not only to fill in

your pages and do those exercises. Try to make it a habit of applying this when you do your composition. I actually do it. I tell them to keep their vocabulary open to the side, grammar book side by side and then write their composition

*Excerpt 5*

But then again, it depends upon the time, you see. Running out of time here, all the time. And it's the marking that takes a long time. I have to give them... see if I continue this I will require, for that I need, actually I do this like I told you, when I do the text I do all aspects of language in that. You see the grammar is there, the vocabulary is there, the language part is there, everything is done when I take the textbook with them. But then, only one block period in a week is not sufficient for that kind of work. And it's too large a strength to cater to their personal... to these needs.

*Excerpt 6*

Because we don't do listening. Listening is only what they listen when I read. And I tell them what the expression should be in terms of intonation, stress pitch etc. Everything I teach them. The real way would be language laboratory where you would have, you know, only got one group of students. It comes back to the strength. What is hampering my teaching is because of the strength. The strength is too large for me to cater. If I had 15 students, for example, I have a language lab, even if I don't need a language lab, give me a room with a cassette and a player will do, you see. Listening comprehension will really help the students because in the long run they are going to be, you know, overseas and being exposed to different kinds of accents. So, it is better that way. And then you have the audio-visual. I never get a chance to use it. There's a constraint for time, there's no use for it. And if you want to have it, then you have to go outside school hours, in the afternoons because the AVA room is used by others

*Excerpt 7*

The drawback is the background of the students, from where they come. Very poor expression. For me, basically, what's hampering me is the strength. The class, definitely. Language ability on one hand and the number of students... the number of students

*Excerpt 8*

Because it's a huge class. I cannot... and I don't want them to sit that way. When each one does not think for himself independently. There are advantages and disadvantages, you see, because here if you make them sit in pairs, one has to be of a higher calibre than the other one, you know. That is the point of the role of the teacher when she gives them the arrangement. But it may happen at the same time if the higher IQ students are not strong-willed enough to make the other one work. The weaker one tends to depend upon the stronger student for each and everything. That is the major drawback and that is, children have this temptation, you see, you cannot hold them back. You can talk about their consciously... oh you're doing it (cheating) all the time, don't give in to temptation, don't look into each other's books. You know, you just cannot. It's human nature

*Excerpt 9*

The assessments are very closely timed, especially the first assessment, I think is a futile one. And always the results are defeated because we have hardly come in and getting to know our students. They're trying to adjust to them. And it's time for the first assessment. So I feel that the first one is too early in the day. I don't think as a teacher I would recommend having such an early assessment. Assessments should be... as an assessor you have every right to assess a child only after you teach them something in your class. That point of time, when you're assessing, you're assessing somebody else's abilities and somebody else's teachers. And that also, that also the children have come back after a break, so they have to get back into the mood. So I feel only after I've fed them with something then can I expect something back

*Excerpt 10*

Yes, yes. I think it shouldn't be that way [too many assessments] because children tend to take it too easy, Some of them won't try to make an attempt. No effort is made on the students' part. So if you keep the number down low, then students will give value to English essays, more importance to it, for example. That term what you teach, you assess them that term and then the next term. So that is more useful

*Excerpt 11*

Teaching language. They're [assessments] a yardstick for your... measurement to evaluating or testing one's own ability in the language. So what if it is language? You got to test yourself, to know whether you have understood what is being taught. I know personally if I go in, for example, I go in for a French class now at

this point of time in my life I would rather, I would definitely of course like to sit for an exam, to see, to assess yourself. Students don't think like that, of course. That's the difference between a mature mind and an adolescent

*Excerpt 12*

Definitely. Oh yes, definitely [exam pressure]. Because it is you who are questioned. Students are never blamed. That is what one thing... I mean I've been in the profession for the last thirteen years. It does not affect me very much because I've grown out of it. Because my profession demands that I do justice in the classroom. As long as I do justice, because I'm not going to teach them only with the point of view of the exams... you can't escape from it. There's no escape from that at all.. I try to because that's what I'm saying... so it affects my teaching because I'm trying to gear them up only to answer the paper 2

*Excerpt 13*

Yes, of course [teaching towards the exams]. Because that is what my job here entails. I'm personally not at all for it... personally speaking. I want to see them [the students] perform. So even my assessment tests, what I set for them in the class in F4, I'm giving them the F5 'O' level papers. So, personally speaking, I'm not game for it, but when it comes to sitting for the paper, I have to do justice to the students. My views and my principles are to my own self. You see, I cannot let the children suffer. And at the same time, I cannot lead them up the wrong path, you know ...

*Excerpt 14*

I feel that some students want to learn more because they love the language. I have met those kinds of students. And some come for the fashion... you must be "in". so you should know English language. Yes, you will be surprised. There are a few. Some come entirely for the purpose of getting good grades at 'O' levels. So give to me only 'O' level training, you know that kind... majority are 'O' level students, exam minded students. yes

*Excerpt 15*

Because I want more interaction. I feel personally we do not give students a chance to talk. I'm very different. I want my students to maximise talking.

*Excerpt 16*

Because children have come from the PMB level and the PMB standard here is extremely low compared to what they start for the 4 in preparation for 'O' level exams. A very few percentage are prepared for the end-of-year exams. Naturally, our objective is in preparing them for the exams. So, in 2 years time we have to get them ready for the 'O' level kind of set-up. So it is very exhausting in the sense there are basics, grammar as such, and vocabulary which are not that highly grounded. So it's a recapitulation of whatever they have been doing, and at the same time, we harness their written skills

*Excerpt 17*

It is because again that our students who have been waiting to write more than, speaking very technically, waiting to write more than 300 words. But there is a word limit constraint in PMB. Therefore, they're not allowed to write more than 300 words. Our students would love to do that, and that is an eye opener

*Excerpt 18*

I wouldn't put myself completely within the brackets of a facilitator or an educationist as such. It's very hard for me to say because all these years of experience, my methodology is more towards developing the feeling of pleasure and appreciation for the language. It gives me rewards. That is what I do. So I don't know how you would put that. Because I don't teach them in an authoritative style or facilitator. I try to incite the feeling of anxiety in them to learn the language and to appreciate it, not to learn it as a mundane task. Because I've found over the years, once you develop that sense of wanting in them, there's always a yearning in them to go further. And that is how I work. So I think I've more of a psychological approach towards my students and interaction

*Excerpt 19*

Lesson plans are again based on your yearly scheme. I find writing the record book here quite pointless, in a sense, because that square is not enough for me to write what my lesson plan should be. So I set out myself a target, an objective. In this period I have got to do this much. Again that period is too short. 35 minutes is not enough for me to achieve the wholeness of that one topic or one sub-topic for that matter.

*Excerpt 20*

First period, the lesson plan would say 'introducing to them the new ideology I'm going to introduce. So it'll be in the form of grammar, vocabulary, phraseology or composition. Accordingly I divide it that way.

Sometimes, some topics are not enough, for example, tenses are a wide topic, very wide topic. It takes ages, especially catering to different students in the class. For example, if I'm doing present perfect tense, I'm teaching that and I do grammar according to the vocabulary of the text. When I'm reading I draw their attention to that particular aspect. And the composition, I set will be something to do with tenses. So you see, the wholeness of that one topic is too wide a range to complete in that one lesson plan as such

*Excerpt 21*

By marking [evaluating students' work]. The purpose is grooming them for comprehension and composition. That work I mark. That will be my way of evaluating the students and my teaching. Based on this evaluation, I will go to the next topic. Especially in F4. Because F4 is the building stage. Next year is totally into continuous writing and comprehension

*Excerpt 22*

I think it's my creativity, which has a creative approach to language learning. Many students have benefited out of that. I get back in the form of dedications and all that. It's always because I keep on encouraging them maybe

*Excerpt 23*

A good English student is a bit difficult to say. Because to me I think there's no good or bad ... what I feel is a child who applies what I teach in class, understands that and then gives me back in the form of his work. I would say is a very diligent child. There are some students who actually absorb every single word that you tell. Even the common errors, you know, that I write on the board and explain to them. The child will not make the same mistake the next time., how to introduce variations in structures. You tell them, they apply it. They do it and they do it well both in oral as well as written work

*Excerpt 24*

Because I feel it is the teacher who should know where to draw the line and show the student his or her place. I'm known as a very, very friendly teacher. They talk to me. But you know, when I want them to stop, it's a stop. You don't go beyond this. I mean, there are teachers who are very friendly here, will go down to their level and talk their language. I don't like that. That's why I said, I'm not one of their peers. Where to draw the line is up to the teacher. So you see, friendly can be very different ways, like you said, as a peer. I am a peer but I'm your teacher too. I earn your respect, maintain this. It is entirely up to the teacher. The student is a student after all. Whether he's intelligent or a nincumpoop, the children will be misled, teacher is very friendly and so we can get away with everything, get away with anything. That is the common understanding here

*Excerpt 25*

But they end up very personal when leaving the school. They come and tell you ... we also tend to be a bit relaxed. In the beginning, in 4CS, I laughed a lot in the class, but at the same time I'm very firm when it comes to work. I'm very firm on where to draw the line, so they can't take undue advantage of me. But there are a lot of teachers who allow that, at least, some of them. And I don't like that, I just don't like that at all. So I feel as a mature person, a teacher should know where to draw the line and that's where my experience has helped me

*Excerpt 26*

Because the child has got to understand that this teacher is going to teach me still and you're going to have me as your teacher. So that distance should be maintained till the child leaves the school. Because when the child is in the school, he's been following so many of the norms, conduct and conditions of the school

*Excerpt 27*

Very many, many roles [of a teacher]. A guide, facilitator, confidante, councillor, mother, friend. You cannot be the one strict, disciplined person or the chatterbox. I would say that like a chameleon, you have got to change your colours, change your attitudes. You need to do that. Because that's where the creativity remains, to keep the juices flowing. You know, I like my kids pumping and to the last moment. I want my kids like that. Once the exams are over, you can relax. But till then, you have to keep them on their feet and keep them thinking



*Excerpt 28*

I don't think it [student-centred learning] should be allowed. I personally feel, in my experience and in my present situation, I've not come across that still ... because the syllabus has been laid down by the MOE. Wherever you're working and you are going to abide by the syllabus. And I don't think a child is in a position at any age, for that matter, even the F4 and F5... I don't think it can be student-centred

*Excerpt 29*

First and foremost, the ambience, the environment, that is. A good English class would require an audio visual, a projector at least, not this chalk and board, you know. You can always prepare your lessons before hand. Everything is ready, so the students are not bored. Spend time motivating them... You know like that. So when you have the audio visual probably, I think that is a good English class. Teachers should have a lot of freedom in how they cater to the needs of the students. And good English class, I would say this, that they should be divided according to their abilities. It has had bad effects and good effects. But I feel the advantages are more because the good ones are losing out a lot when he mixes with the weaker ones ... the weak one is ... I mean he's grasping. In 4S2 I see 4 or 5 students. They're literally grasping. Don't know what is going on. The others are quite comfortable, so I go ahead. But these people, they're struggling to get there. The mediocre student is neither here nor there. So I think ... like the International School, streaming is a must

*Excerpt 30*

... that's why I said, the teacher should be given a free hand in a sense. Total interaction with the students and I think students should be talking more. Talking more because when they talk, ESL especially, it's only when the students open their mouths and talk can you teach them where they're going wrong or right. And guide them in their mistakes. So again, we come back to what the strength and the time ... a good English class would require ... And teachers are helpless here ... some at least. Now, some teachers are very happy to talk, all the time.

Interview Excerpts : SG1 (STUDENT GROUP 1)*Excerpt 1*

- S1 don't like doing ... um ... like comprehension and stuff like that, because it's boring and stuff like that
- S1 I have to answer questions and have to understand the passage, like really understand it and stuff
- S2 yah, I enjoy the composition
- SS yah, composition's good
- S2 she gives us topics, and she one by one explain for around five minutes. she explain that we might be able to understand the topics that she gave us
- S3 if we don't understand, she'll just walk around and she just comes and help us write our composition when we don't know how to start it

*Excerpt 2*

- S4 if it's got to do with English, it's not much of a difference, just pretty normal, I should say. I don't feel anything, just normal
- S5 except for grammar. I don't like it. it's just so many rules and stuff

*Excerpt 3*

- S5 yeah, it does[ grammar helps]
- SS yes

*Excerpt 4*

- SS no! [using the language taught]  
 S1 we use slangs  
 SS not really [ in the classroom]  
 S2 if you talk to the teacher, no  
 S4 only if we talk among ourselves

*Excerpt 5*

- S2 it's [school language] helpful if you talk to those high class people  
 S1 principals. high commissioners

*Excerpt 6*

- S1 teacher, I think grammar's a bit hard to understand  
 S4 it can be frustrating, yah. it doesn't make sense, and we still don't get it. yah,  
 it can be frustrating, but it does help, you know, in doing our comprehension  
 and essays, yah

*Excerpt 7*

- S1 for me, I think when I get to learn new, big words. yeah, like use big words... I don't know, to  
 impress girls

*Excerpt 8*

- SS yah! [high level of difficulty of classroom language]  
 S5 not all the time  
 S3 mostly, she gives us simple, simple words  
 S4 I don't know ... sometimes, she uses it over and over, so it's like,  
 we got used to it and sometimes we use it, we apply that to ... you know,  
 our papers and stuff, so it helps

*Excerpt 9*

- S1 when she scolds us [what they dislike most]  
 S2 yeah, when we're talking. she lectures us for the whole period  
 SS yah!  
 S2 comprehension because we have to use words we're not sure ...  
 S4 it's pretty stupid, isn't it? I mean, everything's in the passage and we have to  
 break down and things like that. it's so stupid, it's ...  
 S2 dull  
 S4 yah. there's no use of, you know, I mean you wouldn't be able to answer the  
 question I you don't understand the passage, so why should we answer the  
 questions? it's a waste of time

- S3 um, I think in English, there's nothing much to dislike about it. um (1.0) not really like pretty much, just there're some words I don't understand, probably. it's like, I want to try to understand it myself first, and only if I can't get the words, I'll look up in the dictionary. I prefer sometimes to do things by myself without any help from someone else
- S5 er ... yeah, grammar [dislike most]
- S2 I ... yah, it's like grammar because ... I use the words like so simple, but when you put them together, you get it wrong. it's not so simple
- S it's true ...
- S1 yah, grammar and comprehension

*Excerpt 10*

- SS composition[ I like most]
- S3 it's creative
- S2 < it's very imaginative
- S4 yeah, and there' re no rules. you can write anything
- S5 yeah. we can express ourselves
- SS < yeah

*Excerpt 11*

- S3 usually first and second assessment tests ... kind of easy cos' we're just starting new topics, so the others will start to become hard, like complicated things instead of the easier stuff that we had earlier in the year
- SS no, not really ... [exams helping language improvement]
- S4 I don't know about the other people, but for English, I don't study as such. no, I don't go through anything. I mean, there's nothing to go through, I don't know ...
- S4 I don't know. Maybe. er ... the thing I don't get is the comprehension. Every assessment test we have comprehension
- S3 only comprehension ...
- SS yeah
- S4 < yeah, and it's only comprehension and ... I mean ... that doesn't help our grammar, I mean because it's just comprehension ... it's just picking up you know, the facts from the passage and you know writing it down, so it's not much grammar work there, considering what we've done for grammar
- S3 I say, actually it's not necessary to give us exams. you can't actually, ah, improve your skills by doing tests. instead do research on your own with friends, projects given. usually people improve their skills by doing research and other stuff, instead of doing exams, which is what I think is useless
- S5 waste of time. just striving to get good marks. all we do is try to make it better

*Excerpt 12*

- S2 no [exams do not help with spoken English]

- S4 not the comprehension  
 S3 yeah, composition or ...  
 S4 yeah, composition, orals or grammar, that might help, but not comprehension  
 S2 waste of time, especially since I don't study. exams for me in English is just to get higher grades  
 S1 yeah, same thing. I don't study for the exams. just enough to go to the next level  
 S1 well, yeah ...  
 S3 not really. even if I get good marks, lots of English we still don't understand ... so it doesn't mean that we're good

*Excerpt 13*

- S3 because ... I think she already chose the student to answer. malu [malay word meaning shy] ... [passiveness in class]  
 S4 because they feel that if they get it wrong, the others will mock them  
 S1 yeah. our class always does that  
 S4 and our class always laugh ...  
 S2 some are new ... just came in  
 S4 probably we just can't be bothered. I can't be bothered myself

*Excerpt 14*

- SS no [not good to be passive]  
 S4 cos I'll never learn, to correct our mistakes  
 S2 smaller group will be better, so we won't be ... sometimes we think, let someone answer, one of them will stand up  
 S4 but nobody does

*Excerpt 15*

- S3 normally, she gives all the answers. if we answer wrongly and she says it's correct, then she's not qualified to be a teacher

*Excerpt 16*

- S2 quiet [what the teacher expects from them]  
 S3 usually good attitude  
 S4 not really. she doesn't expect things that good from us because she knows we're not a very sensible batch  
 S2 < not really quiet. she wants us to participate more ...  
 S4 yeah, just to listen

*Excerpt 17*

- S4 I don't think so ... [student-centred learning]  
 S3 probably they'll say, "o.k. let's go to the library"  
 S4 the students will probably pick the easiest subjects and they won't pick comprehension, so we won't have any comprehension

- S5 we'd have compo everyday  
 S3 because usually if you let the students decide, they have different ideas.  
 probably one will choose one, the other will choose another. it's like ...  
 S2 there'll be a riot!  
 S4 depends on what kinds of responsibilities  
 S2 I'd think the teacher is timid. she should be strict. she should show discipline

*Excerpt 18*

- S2 understanding [ teacher]  
 S1 fun  
 S3 using jokes or something that have to do with English  
 S4 somebody like Mrs. M. she's a good teacher. she doesn't joke around, but  
 she's quite strict and intelligent  
 S3 she encourages us

*Excerpt 19*

- S3 it depends on what job you get. if you mix with other people outside Brunei, it's like you can cope  
 with  
 other people by learning their language, cos they keep talking to you. you actually  
 learn how they speak, how their culture is like  
 S2 yep. Cos' to improve our English, we speak a lot to other people. we learn new words from them  
 S4 we use slangs, it's like we speak Chinese and English or Malay and English,  
 it's never really

*Excerpt 20*

- S5 the presence of the teacher ... that's it [ why students are very quiet in class]  
 S3 yeah, cos' when the teacher's in class, you just have to have discipline. if you  
 act wild in class, you will actually end up in the principal's office  
 SS yes, yes!  
 S4 well, I guess we have to respect the teacher. I mean, we don't actually have to  
 respect our friends, I mean ... they won't mind because they know us  
 S3 and for teachers, if you say a slang to the teacher, they'll say, 'why are you  
 talking like this? didn't your teacher teach you anything?' she'll think that  
 you're stupid and cannot speak proper English

*Excerpt 21*

- S1 to speak proper English and learn big words [learning objectives]  
 S2 speak better. to promote myself to people  
 S5 I just want to make my composition better  
 S3 for me, English probably if I have a bright future ahead of me, probably like  
 making speeches. speech counts. actually if you don't know what to say,  
 you'll feel like shy and hot, you'll become like an idiot  
 S4 basically, if you have got good English and I mean you meet a person for the  
 first time, it's actually a very good impression. now, I you er ... go about

socializing with people and you have a good command of English, that's also very good. if you go for job interviews as well, you need it

*Excerpt 22*

- S3 environment, study environment [ways of promoting English learning in school]  
S2 computers  
S3 I wouldn't think of advanced technology, like computers. it's like probably a teacher who teach you with her own skills instead of using programmed computers. and aircond would also be a good idea. if you're cool and not feeling too hot, you can actually have a better environment  
S4 like he said, improve the atmosphere. now we don't have the mood to study  
...  
S2 first of all, get a smaller group of people. the teacher give us projects more so we can look out for new words to get to know and understand (1.0) um (1.0) a better environment and an understanding teacher  
S1 I think a teacher should be like interested in students individually, like um ... should care about what they do outside also like we care for them ... give us a shoulder  
S3 praise us  
S2 they shouldn't show favouritism  
S5 I want a teacher who gives us more interaction  
Ss no, never, not for us, no [ to groupwork]  
S4 we're noisy. that's why she does it in the science class. they're probably more disciplined than we. we are a big class, so when we get into groups, we become noisy

*Excerpt 23*

- S2 um ... average. we should do more group activities  
S3 I think it's useless. I don't think we should have group activities  
S3 It's like usually some people, they just group together and chat and talk around  
S3 yeah, but usually students don't really care  
S2 field trips  
S3 yeah, that'll be interesting

INTERVIEW EXCERPTS: SG2 (Student Group 2)

*Excerpt 1*

- S1 I think because we have to improve our vocabulary, so she does a lot of English work  
S2 you know for the past few years ... I've been doing English, since F.1 I think it's more like ... it's like more restricted, I think. because all we have to do is ... you know, work, I mean, written work. so, you know, you don't get to communicate a lot, that's what I think because we had Miss Lee F1, I think, and I think basically, mostly we do a lot of written work  
S3 depends on the teachers  
S2 yeah, depends on the teacher, but Mrs. Manik does a lot, you know, after you came, she did quite a lot of . um...

S3 interactive  
S2 yeah, interactive work, so which is good. and I think we should do more ...

*Excerpt 2*

S3 so like once in a while, when she thinks we should relax a little, she makes one activity  
S1 depends on our work. if half of the class did well, she'll do like an activity. but I a lot of  
us don't do well, then she'll just go on and do work  
S3 cos she wants to make us ... like influence us  
S4 she wants to make us like appreciate more the subject where we learn English

*Excerpt 3*

S5 I love my English lessons  
S1 I think it's a relaxing time  
S2 + S3 language, yah, the language, it comes out very easily  
S4 it's different from other subjects  
S2 we speak English, yah, for the rest of the subjects, but, you know, even if we don't get to  
communicate a lot, we ... it's a good thing that we have English, you know. other  
subjects are more like lined up when you get to like read from textbooks only. so it's not  
much fun  
S3 maybe it's because it's a language. I guess we can learn more interesting things from the  
language  
S2 yeah, and new words, so you don't have to memorise it. once you read it, it's already in  
your head, cos' it's a language and one pick it up easily  
SS yes

*Excerpt 4*

S2 yeah, that's right. but we really enjoyed the interactive work she's done so far  
S1 about twice a month  
S2 yah? but before. we've never done this before. it's like ... when the first term is ending,  
then she introduced it  
S1 yah, but even the year before, we've never done this, so it's like ...  
S2 everything has been lined up basically, all written work  
SS yah

*Excerpt 5*

S3 humour [what I like most about English]  
SS yes, humour

*Excerpt 6*

S1 yes, there is humour. cos' she lets us pick up from her ...  
S2 like the acting the other day? you know we get to express ourselves more, so it's much,  
you know ...  
S3 we get to see the different talents of everybody, so it's very interesting  
S2 that was the first time  
S5 yah  
S2 other times, um ... other times. honestly speaking, it's kind of boring, sometimes you  
know  
S1 grammar, vocab, grammar, vocab ... then compre, compre, compre  
S3 we do a lot written work  
Ss yes  
S3 like write, write, write. but she doesn't give like a lot. it's like she spaces it out, a little at  
a time ...  
S5 but sometimes we write too much  
S1 one lesson about twenty sentences  
S2 to me, I think written work don't do much for me. because you know all this written  
work, if it makes sense to you, then it's o.k. i'm right. but after that, I think, talking  
would do much

S1 yah, it's like we're wasting our time writing down and she's like reading it and like writing, so it's like a waste of time  
S3 cos' I think if we talk more, it helps us in our orals  
S5 yah

*Excerpt 7*

S5 grammar. not that good in it. there's a lot of written work also. it gets tired and boring  
S4 sometimes, sometimes it can get a bit boring, written work. sometimes on and off she treats us to the library and try to liven things up  
S2 I think she does this is, you know, classroom activities, is basically as a reward . because you know, if we've done well, it's like a reward for us. so I think that's the reason why she's done it

*Excerpt 8*

S1 a torture [the exams and assessments]. I mean, o.k. sometimes we get really ... I can't say I'm happy with my marks. I'm not happy with my marks  
S3 but maybe they have too many assessment tests, but it's not that bad  
S2 I just don't get the point of having English assessments. I don't get the point of it because you know, you talk in English, you know, maybe you write, but it's just that. I don't understand why you should test like that ...  
S1 they should concentrate more on oral though  
S5 yes  
S1 because when we go overseas, they're not going to look at your written work most of the time, you know. like even if you get A1 in English for 'O' levels but your speaking is no good, like you go around with that accent of yours, you know. it's like ... they should put more into the oral  
S5 cos' if you want to go to uni, they'll interview you, like you keep stammering and stammering, they'll be like  
S1 yah lah, no lah  
S4 I don't worry about the exams, they're quite easy sometimes. if you read a lot at home, talk at home, it shouldn't be a problem  
S5 actually, it's just like normal comprehension. I think it is actually testing our skills and how we can achieve, like summarizing

*Excerpt 9*

S2 depends [that exams really help in learning English]  
S1/S3 it might, it might  
S3 sometimes, we have some students. they answer questions, they address the questions in the same way which means they don't improve at all. but if we actually go in a different way, like the teacher told us, then maybe we can improve, and maybe we can learn more words  
S2 and the way we write too, like we write books, you know. we need to comprehend a lot  
S1 it's better to ... you know that day we had the activity and we learn new words like 'cantankerous', so like you know when you do writing, you know, you just write and you might think about something else, and your mind is not into it. so it's better to have activity where teacher makes sure that you are listening and you know if not your mind will be on what am I going to eat for lunch  
S1 it depends. if like, you can make a choice actually, like they should give us a choice if we want oral or you want this, you know ...  
S3 then we'll all want this ...  
S1 yah, but depends. some people who want to be a writer, so wants to advance ...  
S2 depends on what you take you mean ...  
S1 yah. you know, like for advance English and writing ...

*Excerpt 10*

S1 take out the summaries  
S2 that's where we lost a lot of marks  
S3 no matter how well we do in our compre, if we don't do well in our summary, it pulls down our marks  
S1 losing seven marks in summary is like normal already



- S5 yah
- S3 yes, I guess it's important because they just want to see if we can actually reduce that passage
- S1 it's one quarter of that ... it's twenty-five marks
- S4 I think it's kind of important because it changes whether you can understand ... it's a skill thing you know, so it's a test of our skills. but it's there for a reason. they should have it once in every few chapters, not so often
- S5 I wouldn't take out the summary, because ... I think they have those things like they ask you to do some research which we never do, and those exercises which ... maybe they should only put passages. I wouldn't mind if they put in activities like group activities, like talk and acting
- Excerpt 11*
- S1 you know, like rather than wasting twenty minutes of writing out twenty sentences and the next fifteen minutes like, you know, discussing through the items, wastes my ink. it's ... I don't know, it's like we spend more time writing down the sentences, so might as well, she just like, you know, read it for us and say 'o.k. what's the answer', you know
- S2 you know sometimes like the sentence, you're suppose to correct it. if she just gives us ... like o.k. the sound's right. this looks right. so you answer it's right and it's right. so I think it's no use
- S3 maybe some students may not like it because they're not confident. they get up and they say the wrong answer. then they'll feel like, oh, I'm not good at this. I think English is not me
- Excerpt 12*
- S2 yes [ students should participate more actively in class]
- S1 it seems they have a good case of low esteem
- S3 too embarrassed
- S2 and also like I said before, we've only done this this year, so you know, we're not, I mean all the communicating work, it's only done this year. I think we're not used to it and ...
- S1 we've just met each other like just this year, you know, we were all from different classes, so ...
- S2 we've all been reshuffled, so we're still getting to know each other
- S1 yah, we're getting to know one another
- S3 I think they're scared to go up and make a fool of themselves
- S1 so they're saying that, oh maybe they'll laugh at me
- S3 they'll make fun of me for the rest of my life. they'll ... something like that. it's not that they really believe that ... they just feel scared. you don't just stand up and say, 'I know the answer!'
- S2 maybe they can't handle criticisms that well, sometimes
- S4 for me, sometimes I don't answer because I know that someone else is going to stand up to answer
- S3 everybody's like that, so everybody's just ...
- S5 I think people here don't dare to answer as much as people elsewhere. don't know,

maybe, it's human nature, maybe we're Asians

*Excerpt 13*

S2 no to student centred learning]

S2 actually, I don't think so. because seriously speaking, I think that we would misuse that authority. but, I think that the teacher should come and sit down with us and talk things over, what we should do, and if we agree with that, then they should go along with it

S4 it's also kind of good. because the student gets to participate and he/she can also be more committed. I think you have to elect leaders or else people will just do what they want

S3 I think once in a while, o.k. not every time. I think it depends on the student. when the student is hardworking, it's o.k. the lazy student will probably go along with it

S1 the hardworking student can do it. they're responsible enough

S5 I prefer to have some say, but for me it's like most people are kind of lazy, so we go like ... no written work, no written work, and you know the exams come up and you have not enough experience. then you go oh no, I should have done ...

S1 no, just for the sake of making our parents happy [the exams]

*Excerpt 13*

S2 if it's too much, sometimes it can be a burden, you know. especially if we have nine subjects to study. only next year, we get to drop them and you know, I think, for the sake to just assess us, then I think it's o.k. but sometimes it can be just, you know, just too much for us

S5 without exams, we don't study. so it's bad. but maybe exams are also quite good. I guess it helps us to study

S3 it can actually pressurize our students. they don't study at all. so they don't do well, which is more pressurizing

S1 so when you don't do well right, it's like, it's not ... it might not be, you know, just where you don't know. you might be careless or something, like, let's say for the 'O' levels. we don't get our papers back. who knows there's a marking error or something and you never know, you might get a 'C' and the rest of your life you'll never know, it could be an 'A'. you know, careless marking

S3 and exams help us ... actually report books are for us to go to a uni and a good one at that too. so, I guess exams play a bit more ...

S4 I agree. exams are important. if they're not there, then we won't progress

S2 I think we should have like after each lesson, we could have a test. you take away our books and we just write down whatever teacher said. I mean, it's like a test after the lesson. we get to recap what the teacher said. so I think we should do that more often. instead of having monthly tests, as you know

*Excerpt 14*

S5 I like teachers who are fun all the time

S3 strict and fun

S2 like Mrs. M. more open ...

S3 strict but fun

S2 more open in that you can say what you want to say and that the teacher won't criticize you in any way, you know

S1 not too uptight

S3 and they'll actually act like a family, you know. like when you come in, you say you can talk to me

S2 yah. you can talk to her about things and ask for advice

S4 more strict in the inside but outside you know, have fun

*Excerpt 16*

S3 yah. whatever we learn in the classroom is ... we're talking like this because we learn English since we were young. so when we go out, we're actually using all this knowledge we've been taught. without this knowledge, I guess we won't be able to communicate

S2 especially when you go overseas, you know, and you get to communicate with other people and it would be awkward with going there with a different accent

S3 yah. but we still think it's helpful. it's also good foundation for us. then we can use that foundation and build it up

*Excerpt 17*

S1 no, I don't think ... [ language of school is similar to language used outside]

S4 in Brunei, the majority is Malays and Chinese. so they like to speak in singlish style. so it's not very good when we go overseas. here we get used to it

S2 so here, we slip, like 'o.k. lah'

S1 but when you go overseas, you get influenced too. cos' my friend has come back with this new accent.

S2 I think it's what we've been brought up with. what kind of English we're brought up with. so it goes on and sticks there. so outside, when you go to US I think the language is more refined, like Daniel said and more fluent

*Excerpt 18*

S3 attention, more attention and more response [teacher's expectation of students]

S2 but the problem is, I think our class is too huge. and she's giving us a lot of written work. so she wants us to respond, it's kind of difficult

S2 she makes us stand up and speak up

S3 she'll pick one of us, 'o.k. you, what's the answer'

*Excerpt 19*

S4 speaking good English [learning objectives]

S3 confidence in the language

Ss yah

S2 confidence in speaking

S5 speaking to other people

S2 but actually everything here [in the school] is lacking. even the library is lacking. so we don't really get to read much stuff, you know

S3 it's to do with the atmosphere. we feel very frustrated

*Excerpt 20*

S2 um... not to be so uptight. nothing is like scheduled, you're supposed to do this, you're supposed to do that, no. I think should be more open, nothing like scheduled, like in previous years, Miss Lim, she just made us do written work. we should do a lot of talking [ideal classroom]

S1 more interaction

S2 yah, more interaction

S1 that's what we really need

- S5 we need to put more effort in it, to study English, like you have to read more, do more exercises orally
- S3 I think the interaction between the teacher and students is the most important thing. because without that, it means there is no more communication, it would be very boring. the teacher might feel bored and students might feel bored and neglect the English subject. actually it's a very interesting subject
- S4 you have to speak it at home with your parents. you must enjoy using English
- S2 and for the teacher, it'll be great if they're like into what we're into now. anything that's like upcoming, you know. that's a good way of communicating

## Transcription Conventions

T	teacher
SS LL	students
S EI	nominated student
M	first initial of student's name, where known, changed for anonymity
( )	words spoken, not audible
(yes)	best guess for word(s) spoken
(( ))	transcriber's description
<	two speaker's talk overlaps at this point
2.0	pause timed in seconds
?	interrogative intonation
<i>have</i>	emphasis

## APPENDIX 13

### CLASSROOM TRANSCRIPT

- 1 T ((writes down five grammar items on the board)) alright. we begin. Y, tell me the first sentence. read the sentence with the blank
- 2 L1 ( )
- 3 T alright. what will you put in between or in the blank?5.0 sorry?
- 4 L1 ( )
- 5 T alright. L, is he correct? 4.0 yah?
- 6 L2 (yes)
- 7 T A, read the second sentence
- 8 L3 ((reads from the board)) the teacher with her students 1.0 (( to indicate the blank)) in class
- 9 T <in the class. what do you think the blank requires? 4.0 ((student comes into class late. teacher looks at student)) today is the last day that you come late to class, alright? or you go back home
- 10 L ((silence)) ((there was a slight commotion among students sitting in front))
- 11 T what happened!? ((walks to the place where the commotion is)) what? what is it? ((students were busy trying to shoo a butterfly out of the window))
- 12 T ((goes back to L3)) yes, A?
- 13 L3 the teacher with her students are in the class
- 14 T say it loudly
- 15 L3 ((repeats his answer))
- 16 T M, is that acceptable? 5.0
- 17 L4 yes
- 18 T yes? ((nodded at student))
- 19 L4 yes
- 20 T yes, you say yes. alright, we come back to that later. S, read the next one. don't disturb, please ((this to another student who was talking))
- 21 L5 ((reads from the board)) either John or Jack 1.0 ((to indicate the blank)) done this

Appendix 13

- 22 T so what will you put in the blank? 6.0
- 23 L5 have
- 24 T have ((writes it on the board)) S, is it acceptable or not?  
no?3.0 yes?2.0
- 25 L6 no 1.0 yes. yes ((very hesitant))
- 26 T no. my question was is it acceptable or not?
- 27 L6 no
- 28 T no. good. sit down ((writes on the board)) alright, S, sit  
down. S. next one. read the sentence
- 29 L7 ((reads)) none of the boys in the class 1.0 ((to indicate the  
blank)) a culprit
- 30 T what will you put in the blank?
- 31 L7 is
- 32 T is, alright ((writes on the board)) J, is he correct?
- 33 L8 yes
- 34 T yes. sit. J, read the last one
- 35 L9 ((reads)) the committee 1.0 ((to indicate the blank))  
agreed on the proposal
- 36 T so what can you put in the blank?
- 37 L9 has
- 38 T ((writes the answer on the board)) I, is this correct?
- 39 L10 no
- 40 T no. alright. anybody has any different verbs for the  
blanks? I'm using the word 'verbs'. we start at the  
beginning. what are the blanks that have been filled with?  
what are they? 6.0
- 41 LL ((silence))
- 42 T forgot all that you've learnt earlier! these ((indicating the  
answers on the board)) are, and, are, have, is, has ...  
nobody? 3.0 what are these? 4.0
- 43 LL ((a few mumbles and whispers among the students))
- 44 T say it loudly there! verbs! yes or no? what are verbs? S  
F? 5.0

- 45 L11 ((silent))
- 46 T they show action, isn't it? yes or no?
- 47 LL yes
- 48 T please answer. alright? o.k. maybe we cancel the first sentence because I wanted to say something else. ((changed the sentence on the board)) Y, now you tell me, the same sentence goes back to you
- 49 L1 ( )
- 50 T D, is he right?
- 51 L12 yes
- 52 T yes. o.k. at least so far alright. but there are errors there. I'm repeating this topic. in the beginning of the year, if you remember, I told you. in your English construction, the subject has to always agree with the verb. I did tell you what is a subject in a sentence. so that someone or something would be the subject. going by the information, now Johnson, tell me what's the subject in the first sentence? 4.0
- 53 L13 ( )
- 54 T alright. N, in the second sentence, what is the subject?
- 55 L14 the teacher
- 56 T the teacher, good. S, what is the subject in the third sentence?
- 57 L15 either
- 58 T yah? either? are you sure? what or who is the sentence talking about? 3.0 so what would be the subject? 6.0 think! think carefully! isn't it either John or Jack is the subject? you cannot say "either" is the subject alone, alright? V, in the fourth sentence, what will be the subject?
- 59 L16 none of the boys
- 60 T none of the boys. and in the last sentence, A, what is the subject?
- 61 L17 ( )
- 62 T all of you agree on that? all of you agree with what I'm saying? yes? this is because you repeat this mistake in your composition, your written work, alright? J, sit straight ((this to the boy in front)). when we say Jack and Jill is the subject, repeating what I said earlier, the subject agrees with the verb. now you all agree that all these that I have filled in the blanks are verbs, alright? the verbs which shows action. the most important topic next to the



tenses in English grammar is this. alright? here, now, the subject is Jack and Jill. the verb you have supplied for the blanks, this is your supplication. when you write your essay, this has to agree with the subject. now, there are certain rules and regulations and principles that you have to follow for this particular topic. when you try to write the correct verb for this subject, understand? there are some rules, exceptions, to the rules. we say "either" and "neither" must take a singular verb. what is a singular verb? look, we take "are" ((writes it on the board)). the singular verb for "are" would be? 1.0

63 LL is

64 T is ((writes it on the board)) isn't it? according to that definition, the first sentence you'll see that. when you have two 1.0 see it goes back to all the basics. what I taught you. two nouns "Jack and Jill", proper nouns are connected together with the conjunction "and". it will always take the verb "are". this is the first basic rule of agreement verb with subject. all of you following what what I'm saying? Y? comes to the second sentence now. ((reads from the board)) the teacher with her students are in the class. subject in the sentence is "the teacher". rule for agreement of verb with subject is when one noun "teacher" is "are" is definitely wrong here. "teacher" is the main subject. so what will you put here?

65 LL is

66 T is. alright. another noun which is in plural connected with a "with", not necessary "with" but the main subject in the sentence is the teacher. it is not her students. the verb that you supply here has to agree with the subject, "the teacher". M, you said yes. right? understand carefully. if you have a doubt, please ask me. I said subject is very important for you to understand. otherwise you will always go wrong here. the verb must agree with the subject. the main subject here is "the teacher", not the students. so "teacher" has to be highlighted and the verb has to be supplied accordingly. students has to take into

consideration, for this type of sentence. understand, it is very important. the rule does not only say "with", "as well as". and then you have to go along by the sense ... I'll tell you later. the third sentence ((reads from the board)) "either John or Jack 1.0 (( indicates blank))done this." again, understand another rule. when you have "either" and "or" as the subject in a sentence. when you have alternatives, use "either" and "or", the verb is always singular. so "have" here is wrong. so either John or Jack has done this. then the exception to this rule will be the verb which is the noun, the number of the noun that is closest to the verb has to be taken into consideration. don't think that it's something very technical and difficult I'm speaking. very simple this is. if I say "either John or the rest of the boys" understand?

"either John or the rest of the boys blank done this". so the noun close to the verb is "boys". so naturally the verb varies. so the verb varies according to the noun which is closest to it. when you use, you use your own discretion. so it is not hard and fast obviously. the rules. you have to use your own discretion. when you come to such tricky sentences. and remember why I am doing it to detail. because your compositions you make one mistake like this and ½ a mark is deducted. I'm not doing this for the sake of doing it. alright? and ask me if you have any doubts. come to the fourth sentence now. are you all with me? are you all understanding?

- 67 LL yes
- 68 T ((reads the next sentence on the board)) "none of the boys in the class is a culprit". again, when we say agreement, we say "either", "none" we take a singular verb. "none of the boys". "none" is the subject. according to the rule, "none" as a subject takes a singular verb. if I was to say, "none of them are to be blamed", then the verb varies. why? because the number "them" is plural. simple. then we come to the final one, the fifth one. this is not all. these are some very important, basic rules. ((reads the final sentence on the board)) "the committee blank agreed on the proposal". what is committee? 4.0 we know "committee" is the subject. what else can you highlight on "committee"? what is "committee"? 5.0 more than one. what have you learnt? 7.0
- 69 LL ((silence))
- 70 T collective noun! yes or no. you've forgotten. another major rule you have to follow in agreement verb with subject. you have collective nouns. the usage of the verb varies along with the sense of the sentence. five, six, ten persons, it varies. more than three will make a committee. so "committee *has* agreed on the proposal." now who had said the sentence was wrong? I don't remember. yah. This is correct ((marks the sentence on the board)). o.k. now here, you have an exception to the rule. here you're taking the committee as a whole, as a group. but when the sentence makes a discrimination 1.0 the, now here "the committee *has* agreed on the proposal". were I to put it in another way, all various factors ((changes the sentence on the board)). "the members of the committee *were* upset", then I will use a plural verb. alright? a collective noun, a committee, a bouquet of flowers, always will take a singular verb. anyone has any doubt? 4.0
- 71 LL ((silence))
- 72 T if not open your grammar books. ((students getting ready for written work)). enter the index "agreement of verb with subject" ((walks around the class and dictates

exercise)) "supply a verb in agreement with the subject." the first sentence "none of us blank see him". number two. "everyone blank frightened when we blank a tiger." number three. "each person blank a hat". next four. "everybody blank a hat." five "every man blank this". for this you take an alternative in the bracket know/known. next. "neither man blank come." "each of us blank home". "the committee blank to meet tomorrow". "none of the boys in the class blank learnt his lesson." alright. try.

((after about 10 minutes of written work))

- |    |     |  |
|----|-----|--|
| 73 | T   | alright. H, the first sentence   |
| 74 | L18 | none of us has seen him  |
| 75 | T   | correct? none of us has seen him. correct. none of us has seen him. Yvonne 3.0                 |
| 76 | L19 | everyone was frightened when we ((hesitant stop))  |
| 77 | T   | try, try. first tense was? 3.0   |
| 78 | L19 | was  |
| 79 | T   | so use the same tense. alright, Y, given the choice between saw and sees, what will you write? |
| 80 | L19 | saw  |
| 81 | T   | saw, correct. Z, the third one. 2.0  |
| 82 | L20 | each person have a hat   |
| 83 | T   | each person?   |
| 84 | L20 | have   |
| 85 | T   | each? what does the rule say "each" takes?   |
| 86 | L20 | has  |
| 87 | T   | has. any other word, anybody?  |

((bell rings for the end of the lesson))

## APPENDIX 14

### FIELD NOTES

#### Conversations with English teachers Mrs. G & Mrs. M following lesson observations

I observe that at the end of each lesson, both teachers will go over the answers and let the students mark their own work, especially in grammar. Then they will ask how many students attain full marks etc. but do not attempt to help students correct their mistakes. When asked why they do it they say (i) it helps students to correct their own mistakes and (iii) it saves them time marking as they have to handle such large classes. Moreover, they are also teaching other subjects besides English. However, they stress that it is not to humiliate students who perform poorly. Mrs. G says that composition and comprehension exercises are always handed in for marking.

#### Other events of the day

The principal asks that all F3 students be assembled for a briefing prior to their mock PCE exams. He uses these talks to boost morale and encourage students to do their best during the public exams which will be held in October. There is a lot of importance placed on exam results and student performance here.

#### Conversation with Mr. K (Deputy Principal) in his office

He says that in classroom observations, he normally assesses the teacher's performance. He goes on further to say that a good teacher is one who brings about good results from the students. He differentiates "good" and "poor" teachers by the exam results at the end of the school year. Students' failure to achieve good results is due to the fault of bad teaching. He insists that one way to keep teachers on their toes is to get the Assistant Principal to check students' written classwork that teachers set and correct.

He also talks about the current trend of more communicative and interactive teaching and hopes that teachers will also be more aware of such methods and incorporate them into their teaching. He says that some teachers are too traditional in their teaching and beliefs. Students fear them and therefore classroom interaction suffers.

#### Conversations with students during break

Spoke to students in their classroom during recess time. There were altogether 10 or 15 of them, curious to know where I came from and why. I had just carried out an informal classroom observation prior to this conversation. Normally, there is no interaction between teacher and students in the classroom. When I ask why they do not respond to her questions, they said it would be meaningless because she already knows all the answers.

### Conversation with secondary English teachers in the staff room

Had a conversation with Mrs. P and Mrs. M over coffee. I ask them how they feel about students in general. Mrs. P says that students today are not as hardworking as those during her schooldays. They are lazy when it comes to self-study. Only one or two will make the effort to give her their practice essays for comments. According to Mrs. M, students at this level (F4 & 5) think they are very good in the English language but are actually very weak. She feels that the “O” levels are beyond the grasp of the students, that they are not prepared for the “O” levels.

### Conversation with students prior to classroom observation

The students tell me that the teacher has changed their places again. Apparently, the teacher does this occasionally. One of the students says that he feels it is unnecessary to have so many English periods a week. Instead, more periods should be given for Chemistry and Science subjects. For English, there're a lot of repetition of topics, exercises etc.

According to the teacher, places are changed to make sure that students do not form groups or gangs to cause trouble in class. It is for this particular reason that students in some classes are seated apart while other classes sit in pairs. The weaker students tend to get rowdy and cheat during written work. Most of the classrooms in my observation are arranged in the traditional way, with straight rows of students facing the teacher's desk which is located in the front centre of the classroom.

### Conversation with students during break

Speaking to some students during break after their English lesson, I point out to them the numerous times the teacher's questions have been met with whispers and silence. Students do not speak up or wish to respond spontaneously. They say that it is not shyness but that it has become an ingrained habit. As for mumbling and whispering, the teacher can somehow read their lips and know if they have the correct answer. According to them, the teacher and students understand one another in this respect. Students do not have to shout out answers. Teachers can read from their expressions whether her question is answered.

### Conversations in the teacher's room with teachers

Some teachers are talking about a particular student in one of the classes I am observing. According to the teachers, this boy is very adult in his interaction with teachers. One teacher says she feels self-conscious when around him. The boy is too adult for her liking. Other teachers feel that he's polite but interprets his actions as manipulative. The student will greet teachers very politely and ask after them. Teachers do not like his manner (too patronising) as this is not how a student should relate to a teacher. Teachers feel uncomfortable when students try to get too close to them.

### Conversation with Mrs. S & Mrs. A

Over coffee, both Mrs. A & Mrs. S confide that one of the main problems with teaching is parents. Parents are very demanding. This affects their teaching. They are never happy with the teachers' standard of teaching and always complain about teachers to the administrators. Moreover, the school authorities have opened their arms to parents' and students' complaints. So complaints nowadays come from parents and students through the principal. This irritates teachers. Teachers are very unhappy over this matter. They feel that their say have been ignored.

### Concurrent field notes on classroom observation

Students sitting at the back of the class remain passive and bored. This is also because of the large size of the class, which creates problems as the teacher finds it difficult to give her attention to all the students. Students have difficulty with the written exercise despite the notes on the board. A few students keep asking the teacher how to write a report, incurring the frustration and anger of the teacher. Apparently, it is difficult to write about something that does not actually happen. Moreover, according to the students, this is the first time report writing is introduced. Also, students are discouraged from getting out of their places to seek help from friends. The teacher is very strict about doing corrections, getting the grammar right and classroom discipline.

### Concurrent field notes on classroom observation

This is a 35-minute grammar lesson. A number of significant observations have been recorded. One is the frequent use of technical terms by the teacher in explaining the topic. The language is very academic which adds to the very formal learning classroom atmosphere. Furthermore, students are expected to greet the teacher before the lesson, stand up to answer questions and thank the teacher at the end of the lesson. There is also a detached, impersonal relationship between the teacher and students. The teacher does most of the talking while students listened. It is noted, however, that both parties appeared to be quite comfortable and natural with this arrangement. Voluntary student initiation or participation is minimal. According to the teacher, this is due to student shyness, disinterest and their fear of being laughed at. It is noted, however, that a few times, students are discouraged from speaking out unless called upon. More of the responses given are either choral responses or teacher nominated responses. According to the teacher, however, the students have been more responsive than usual that day and attributed this to the presence of the observer.

### Concurrent field notes on classroom observation

The classroom interaction of the lesson consists of a recurring pattern of restrictive question answer exchanges between the teacher and students. Moreover, the teacher appears to have all the answers in hand. She is very strict and exhibits considerable control over classroom interaction. For the students, it is

a matter of guesswork, getting the answers that please their teacher. Student responses come from the same group of students repeatedly. The rest of the class is generally unresponsive. Most of the responses are choral responses. Those sitting at the back of the class appear disinterested and do not participate at all. In evaluating the lesson after the observation, the teacher notes that the class has been more responsive than usual because normally, they are quite “dead” during her lessons. She is quite happy with the outcome of the lesson.

#### Concurrent field notes on classroom observation

The field notes taken during this particular observation shows minimal oral participation on the part of the students. The teacher nominates students to answer questions. Even then, answers are short and hesitant. Students also struggle with the language used, especially when the teacher uses technical language terms and expressions. As a result, those sitting behind lost interest. The exercise given is also very difficult and students (including the observer) are not sure what the teacher wants. Students are seen whispering and exchanging books among themselves, but none ask the teacher for clarification.

## APPENDIX 15

### A REVIEW OF THE CLASSROOM TALK IN SIX OBSERVATIONS

#### Introduction

As an initial stage to in-depth analysis, this chapter contains a review of six classroom observations conducted during the research period in the school. The observations are selected in such a way that they represent the English lessons at different points of time in order that unbiased and objective interpretations can be made. The review is based on data gathered from transcripts taken of six 35-minute lessons in the secondary classrooms. The findings of the review are supported by concurrent field notes and video tapings recorded during observations. The findings are presented wherever possible in figures and tabulated forms to allow for clarity in description and interpretation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings from the review.

#### 6.1.1 Significant features of classroom talk

Altogether, transcripts of six classroom observations are reviewed and then subjected to analytical interpretations. Interpretations made are supported wherever possible by video recordings of the actual classroom lessons. The findings are then matched with concurrent field notes taken during actual observations for cross-reference purposes.

One recurrent feature recorded is the 3-part pattern of question and answer exchanges between the teacher and students. Below are examples of this 3-part exchange structure:

#### Example 1 (Observation 2)

54	T	alright. N, in the second sentence, what is the subject
55	L14	the teacher
56	T	the teacher. good.

#### Example 2 (Observation 1)

77	T	alright. will you use the quotation marks?
78	L5	no
79	T	no. and then some l.o do you use a capital s?
80	L5	no
81	T	no? alright

In example one, the teacher begins the interaction with a question. She nominates a student (L14) and asks the student to identify the subject in the sentence written on the board. The student responds with what she thinks is the answer, a short phrase: "the teacher" (55). The teacher ends the exchange with a feedback remark. She repeats the response given and follows it with an evaluative "good" (56) before initiating a new exchange with another nominated student. Similarly, in example two, the teacher initiates the exchange by asking a nominated student (L5) about the use of quotation marks in indirect speech. The student is asked if there is a need to use quotation marks in indirect speech. The student (L5) responds with a monosyllabic "no" (78) to which the teacher reaffirms by repeating it in turn 79. She then starts another exchange with the same student by asking another question. Here, she asks if the first letter of the second sentence should be capitalized when joined with another to form one sentence. Again, the student's response is a monosyllabic "no" (80). The teacher again ends the exchange with an evaluative remark: "alright" (81).

These two examples show clearly the recurrent pattern of interaction as: teacher initiation – student response – teacher feedback/evaluation. The teacher initiation in both instances is a question aimed at gauging a student's ability to recall facts and knowledge about particular grammar points of the English language. The initiation is followed by a student response, which comes in the form of a short, often monosyllabic utterance that directly answers the question. The oral exchange ends with a comment from the teacher about the preceding response. Essentially, the exchange exhibits a consistent and methodical Initiation-Response-Feedback (henceforth I-R-F) move structure, with



both participants taking neat alternate turns. In fact, the feature is observed to recur in all six lessons, suggesting that the I-R-F is the unmarked form of conversation between teachers and students in the language classroom.

The suggestion is substantiated in the few exceptional instances where the teacher tries without much success to deviate from the 3-part exchange. One clear instance is where there is a change in the initiation question asked, shown in the example below:

Example (Observation 4)

13	T	A, why do you need work?4.0
14	L5	((silence))
15	T	besides earning money. what else comes to mind? 5.0
16	L5	((silence))
17	T	nothing? alright. S
18	L6	to achieve something
19	T	to achieve something. very good. very good. M, to earn money, to achieve something 1.0 anything else that comes to your mind why you need work?
20	L7	er1.0 to have fun
21	T	to have fun. good. sit down. J, do you work because when you work, do you work because you want to work or because you're forced to work?
22	L9	want to work
23	T	you never work when you're forced to work?
24	L9	no
25	T	yes, sure? alright. sit down. G, what kind of work do you find pleasure in?
26	L10	um 1.0

Here, as part of the introduction to the reading passage, the teacher tries to engage the students into expressing their viewpoints about "work" through a series of open and general questions: "why do you need work?" (13), "anything else that comes to your mind why you need work?" (19), "G, what kind of work do you find pleasure in?" (25). These questions should generally generate students in producing complex, thoughtful responses. The responses, however are still basically in the form of silence (14) or short answer-like utterances such as "er 1.0 to have fun" (20), " want to work" (22), "no" (24). Clearly, a change in the pattern of exchange appears to be an uncomfortable experience, both for the teacher and students. The students seem at a loss as to how to respond to such questions that have no right or wrong answers. Thus the responses are invariably short (18, 22, 24) and hesitant (20, 26) showing their lack of exposure to such questions. The teacher continues to evaluate student responses with "very good" (19) and "good" (21) to show her approval of the responses. These feedback cues appear incongruent and awkward considering that the questions asked are exploratory and general in nature and therefore open to many different responses. Thus, sometimes even when the intention is to engage students in expressing themselves in the language, the teachers still finds it difficult to get out of the I-R-F interaction pattern found in examples one and two.

Another example where the teacher tries to deviate from the strict I-R-F exchange is found in the example below:

Example (Observation 6)

34	T	5 to 10 minutes? And you skip some of the articles?
35	LL	yes

36 T do you read the Borneo Bulletin?  
 37 LL yes///no!  
 38 T and News Express?  
 39 LL yes///no!!

In this report-writing lesson, the teacher is seen trying to get students to talk more about the newspapers they read. Her questions in turns 34, 36 and 38, however, are framed in a way that allow for only very short, monosyllabic responses as in turns 35, 37 and 39. Questions such as “do you read the Borneo Bulletin?” must inevitably produce a monosyllabic response from the students, which is seen in turn 37 “yes///no!” This strict and well-defined 3-part structure of interaction may have also affected the patterns of student response. Table 6.1.1 gives a general overview of the patterns of student responses in all six lessons.

Table 6.1.1 gives a general overview of the patterns of student response in all six observations.

Response patterns	Lessons				
	F2Y F2Y 1	F4CS 2	F2Y 3	F4CS 4	F4CS 5
Silence	+	+	-	+	-
Choral	+	-	+	-	+
nominated	+	+	-	+	-
short/subject based	+	+	+	+	+
	6 +				

Key: F2Y class level

+ high frequency of response pattern

- low frequency of response pattern

Table 6.1.1 Patterns of student response in six lessons

A list of all the possible response patterns is categorised. A silent response here refers to total non-response from the students. Examples of silent responses are students not answering at all when asked a question. Choral responses refer to those where a group of students respond together, all at the same time. Usually, such responses are the monosyllabic “yes/no” type that can be easily called out together as a class. Then there is the nominated response where the teacher calls upon a particular student by name to answer a question. Here, the student responses only when called upon to do so. The short response is one where a phrase is given in response to the teacher’s question. Below is an example of such a response:

Example (Observation 3)

9 T number three. “feat”. f-e-a-t, feat  
 10 L a remarkable act  
 11 T yah, a remarkable act, good.

Here, the teacher requires an explanation or definition of the word “feat”. The response given in turn 10 is a short phrase that apparently satisfies the teacher: “ a remarkable act”. The last type of response pattern listed in Table 6.1.1 is the voluntary response. This refers to a response that is freely given by the students. The frequency of occurrence of these patterns are indicated by the + and – symbols. A + shows a high frequency of occurrence while a – shows a level frequency of occurrence.

From the table, four out of the six lessons observed show a high incidence of silent responses, especially at the higher level (F4CS). The following examples show a clearer picture of the extent of such responses:

Example 1 (Observation 4)

37	T	yes, Sheryl? I'll ask you a different question. what if there is no work?
38	L13	((silence))
39	T	S?
40	L14	((silence))

Example 2 (Observation 3)

1	T	what's a tap?
2	LL	((silence))
3	T	how do you get water? 5.0 how do you get water? if you don't buy a tap, you go to a well in this modern age, do you still use a well to pour water? 3.0 don't you call that a tap? then what do you think it was? 7.0
4	LL	((silence))

In both these examples, note the long waiting time following the teachers' questions (5.0 secs/ 7.0secs). The students in example one are silent when asked for their viewpoints and opinions about "work". In example two, students do not respond at all when asked by the teacher to explain what a "tap" is. It is not clear whether they are silent because they do not understand the question asked, or because they are not willing to come up with a complex, lengthy response in the English language.

From Table 6.1.1, it can be observed, however, that students are more willing to give short/ subject based responses:

Example 1 (Observation 2)

54	T	alright. N, in the second sentence, what is the subject?
55	L14	the teacher
56	T	the teacher. good. S, what is the subject in the third sentence?
57	L15	either

Example 2 (Observation 1)

77	T	alright. will you use the quotation marks?
78	L5	no
79	T	no. and then some 1.0 do you use a capital s?
80	L5	no

The questions asked by the teachers in both of these examples are heavily structure-based questions. In example one, L14 and L15 are asked to identify the subjects in two sentences while in examples two, L5 is asked to tell the teacher whether quotation marks are necessary in direct/indirect speech. Here, the students are not required to come up with a lengthy, complex answer but to recall what they learnt in the English verb subject agreement and punctuation. Their responses are short: "the teacher" (55), often monosyllabic as in "no"(78) and readily given with a degree of confidence.

Four out of the six lessons show the predominance of nominated responses. . Moreover, the frequency of nominated responses is seen to be higher in the upper secondary classroom than at the lower level where there are more choral responses. From Table 6.1.1, three out of the six lessons record a high frequency of choral responses, particularly in the lower secondary level class (F2Y). Examples of choral response are shown below:

Example 1 (Observation 3)

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 16 | T  | number line six. ((reads))into any number.<br>does this mean ,2,3,4,5,6?  |
| 17 | LL | no  |
| 18 | T  | no. so in this instance, what do you have?  |
| 19 | LL | songs   |
| 20 | T  | songs. alright. three things line six. ((reads))<br>some critics say. they are people but what do<br>these people do? so are you                |
| 21 | LL | criticize   |
| 22 | T  | can you explain the word criticise then?  |
| 23 | L  | ((whispers)) (make fun of)  |
| 24 | T  | not make fun of. imagine all the critics who<br>are there to listen to your music and making fun of your<br>music. I don't think it's very nice |
| 25 | L  | ((whispers)) (complain) :   |

Example 2 (Observation 6)

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 50 | T  | now, all these news captions in the<br>Bulletin. what are they called? |
| 51 | LL | paragraphs///articles  |
| 52 | T  | some were articles, but mostly they are?                               |
| 53 | LL | news   |
| 54 | T  | if there's an accident, they are?                                      |
| 55 | LL | reports!   |

Most student responses from the above examples are short, choral responses that are given confidently and spontaneously. Example 1 also demonstrates the students' preference for choral to individual responses. While the choral responses in turns 17, 19 and 21 are given in quite a confident way, the individual responses in turns 23 and 25 are whispers, indicating a lack of confidence when it comes to responding individually to the teacher's questions.

Voluntary responses, as is indicated in the Table, is at a low frequency of occurrence across all six lessons. From the field notes and video tapings, there are very rare instances where students respond voluntarily or spontaneously to the teacher's question. Observations show that teachers do not appear to expect voluntary responses either as they frequently call upon individual students to answer questions.

Another prominent feature evident in all six lessons is the instructional talk employed by the teachers during oral instruction in the classroom. Data from the transcripts highlight this common and unmarked linguistic feature:

Example 1 (Observation 1)

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 25 | T | now you have to take note of a few<br>things if you are writing the direct<br>speech. what do you have to take note<br>of?punctuation. do you remember all<br>your punctuations? |
|----|---|--|

Example 2 (Observation 2)

62 T when you write your essay, this has to agree with the subject. now there are certain rules and regulations and principles that you have to follow for this particular topic. when you try to write the correct verb for this subject, understand? there are some rules, exceptions, to the rules

Example 3 (Observation 6)

76 T so you have to organize. It has to be well organized. it has to be logical, so that when people read, they know exactly what is going on systematically.

Examples one and two are grammar lessons while example three is a composition lesson. However, regardless of the type of lessons, the oral instruction of both teachers shares certain common characteristics. All the three examples above exhibit authoritative and instructive elements in the use of the modal verb 'have/has to' as in "now you *have to* take note of a few things" (25), "when you write your essay, this *has to* agree with the subject" (62), "so you *have to* organize" (76). The use of such verbs acts to discourage comments and questions from the students. In all, these modal verbs appear five times among the three examples given.

Moreover, the talk is formal in linguistic structure in the sense that there are no contractions – "you have to take note"/ "you are writing" (25); "there are certain rules" (62); "what is going on systematically" (76). Moreover, the sentences are complete and grammatically correct. The language deviates from ordinary speech which may contain hesitations and unfinished utterances. Instead of the more casual "remember your punctuations?" for example in turn 25, it is "do you remember all your punctuations?" The teachers' oral instruction resembles a written text in the spoken mode.

A final interesting note here is the frequent and unconscious use of the second person "you" by the teachers. "You/your" is used four times each in turns 25 and 62 and once in turn 76. The use of the exclusive you/your" rather than "we" serves to further distinguish between the role of the instructor and learner.

Furthermore, the teacher's instructional talk is heavily peppered with abstracted, specialized language shown in Figure 6.1.2.

Fig. 6.1.2 shows examples of the types of metalinguistic expressions found in the teachers' oral instruction. The extracted expressions in the examples shown in Fig. 6.1.2 indicate the pervasive presence of highly technical expressions in the teachers' instruction. Words like "indirect/direct speech" (25), "proper nouns", "conjunctions"(64) and "antonym" (97) are used ad verbatim regularly and without conscious thought on the part of the teachers. Moreover, there are no attempts made by the teachers in all three examples to explain or discuss these metalanguage with the students. It is quite clear that the teachers are the only ones using this form of language and with a fair degree of confidence. Students are not seen to be engaged in metatalk at all.

			<u>Abstracted linguistic expressions</u>
<u>Example 1 (Observation 1)</u>			
25	T	yah. so <i>indirect speech</i> is also known as <i>reported speech</i> 1.0 and usually they will write in the <i>past tense</i> except if they want to write the words that are actually said	indirect speech reported speech past tense
<u>Example 2 (Observation 2)</u>			
64	T	two nouns Jack and Jill, <i>proper nouns</i> are connected together with the <i>conjunction</i> "and". It will always take the <i>verb</i> "are". this is the first basic rule of <i>agreement of verb with subject</i>	proper nouns nouns verb conjunction agreement of verb withsubject
<u>Example 3 (Observation 4)</u>			
97	T	what is the <i>antonym</i> of any <i>area of usage</i> ? What would be the antonym of "work"?	area of usage antonym
<u>Example 4 (Observation 5)</u>			
52	T	see, it's just <i>changing the voice</i> . So all the <i>functional grammatical</i> ... I'm technically speaking, I'm teaching you is always handy	changing the voice functional grammatical

Fig. 6.1.2 Abstracted language use in instructional talk

Abstract talk is also found in the reading, vocabulary and composition writing lessons. In the vocabulary lesson on re-expression in example four in Fig. 6.1.2, "changing of voice" here specifically refers to the active and passive voice in English. It is difficult to know what the teacher means by "technically speaking" or "functional grammatical", although no student has expressed any difficulty or doubts.

It is questionable however, whether students really understand what the teachers are talking about. It is observed that students continue to listen obediently and rarely voice any problems they may have with such talk, even if it may be well above their heads. Yet, observations show that they do have difficulty in the written tasks set for them at the end of the lessons. Students are seen to stare at the assignments, clearly at a loss as to what to do. When asked, the students sitting at the back of the class shrug their shoulders and say that they do not know how to do the exercises. Part of the difficulty in comprehending the instruction may be that apart from the teachers' metalanguage, the instruction in most cases is also lengthy. The data show the teachers' instruction to be particularly lengthy and monotonous. Examples of teacher oral instruction are provided here to illustrate this observation:

Example 1 (Observation 5)

78 T 'c' and 's'. this is a noun, and 's' is a verb. so also here. This is a noun, how you use this in a sentence. look into the notes for the last one. the teacher's advice,

teacher's what? this answers to the question what? naturally nouns are those which answer to the question what. so you use this in a sentence where you use it as a noun and when you want to use it as a verb, automatically, the 's' changes to 's'. the one you re-expressed it, you're using it as a verb. we have regular practice of football in the school. I'm using it as a noun. we practise football everyday in school, using it as a verb. very, very carefully you should use these two words. alright? did you all follow?

79 LL ((silence))

Example 2 (Observation 6)

72 T then your report must be well organized, like any essay. it has to be well organized and it must be logical, right? imagine, you only have a limited number of words to write your report. if you are going to send it to the newspaper, they only have that small column for you to put your report. if it is not well organized and if it does not run in logical order, can you imagine the people who are going to print the report? they will have a problem. if it, you know, exceeds the space that's given to you, that's number one and if they manage to print it, the people who are reading, you want them to run her and there when they read, huh? when it's not well organized?

In the first example, the teacher is explaining about changing nouns into verbs and vice versa. Although this appears to be the main purpose of this particular piece of instruction, she has also explained at some length what nouns and verbs are. The result is confusion over what really is the main message in this instruction. In the second example, the teacher gives instruction on how to report should be written. It contains a considerable amount of information, all given in one uninterrupted flow. The question is how much of the information actually becomes intake for the students. The number of utterances in each turn from the examples above is shown in Table 6.1.3.

	No. of utterances
Turn78 (Example1)	16
Turn72(Example 2)	41

*Fig. 6.1.3 Number of utterances per turn in teacher oral instruction*

Taking the length of an utterance to be between two full stops, turn 78 has 16 utterances while turn 72 shows a total of 41 utterances. In addition, these are uninterrupted utterances. This shows that the teachers' instruction is lengthy and monotonous. It is monotonous because there is no two-way communication at any point during instruction.

6.1.2 Discussion of the review

The review carried out on the six lessons can be conceptualized within a framework presented in Table 6.1.5.

Features of classroom talk	Characteristics
3-part exchange structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistent</li> <li>• recurrent</li> <li>• assessing recall ability</li> <li>• non-generating talk</li> </ul>
Teacher Instructional Talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal</li> <li>• authoritative</li> <li>• abstracted</li> <li>• lengthy</li> <li>• monologic</li> <li>• non-generating talk</li> </ul>
Form-focused Talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• content reduced</li> <li>• context reduced</li> <li>• non-generating talk</li> </ul>

*Table 6.1.5 Features of classroom oral interaction and their characteristics*

All observations show the inherent, classic IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) framework of classroom interaction first documented by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). It also supports the claim by Seedhouse (1996) that the IRE framework is the unmarked feature in classroom interaction. There was, however, no evidence of teachers exploiting or expanding the IRE to promote language learning as suggested by Van Lier (1998) in the sense that this 3-part structure has not been exploited to generate talk among the students in the ESL classroom. Observations show it being efficiently employed by the teachers to gauge the students' understanding of the lessons. The questions asked usually "test" students on their knowledge about various aspects of the grammar and vocabulary of the L2 and their ability to recall what they have been taught. They invariably elicit short, often, often monosyllabic responses to which the teachers evaluate with a positive or negative feedback. Because the initiation move is almost always made by the teachers, the IRE is seen to further enhance the teacher's status as the key role player in classroom and enables him/her to exert considerable control over the interaction in the classroom, what to talk about and how the talk should be carried out.

A more important insight gained is that the IRE Framework may be a deeply ingrained classroom practice. Thus, as observed in one lesson, when there is a shift in the questioning pattern which requires students to express their viewpoints, it becomes a frustrating and uncomfortable experience for both teachers and students. On the one hand, the teacher shows a lack of experience and inadequate discourse skills in carrying out the interaction successfully. The students, on the other hand, are at a loss as to how to respond to more open questions. Students have been trained into thinking that every question has a right or wrong answer. So when faced with general and exploratory questions that have no right or wrong answers, they get thrown off and do not know how to respond.

It is also apparent that the I-R-F pattern of interaction acts to restrict student responses as documented in all six lessons. This finding is consistent with ESL studies documented elsewhere in the research literature (Long & Sato, 1983; Nunan, 1988; Tsui, 1995) Students are generally reluctant to respond to teachers' questions. One particular pattern of student response that is markedly noticed is silence where there is no response at all to the teachers' questions. Here, it is observed that students opt to remain silent because of the fear of giving the 'wrong' response and, then getting a negative feedback from the teacher in front of their classmates. And this is more apparent at the upper levels where students are more sensitive and conscious of what others think of them.

Moreover, even when there are responses, they are almost always short and monosyllabic, even when given voluntarily, which is not often. While students may feel more confident when calling out short responses, they stumble and hesitated when a longer, more complex response is called for. This may be because students traditionally do not have many opportunities to engage in longer



conversations with their teachers and so do not have the discourse skills to offer such responses when required. It is also expected that when talking to their teachers, attention has to be paid to grammatically correct utterances. The short, monosyllabic student response has been the normal social practice through their years in school and may therefore be a habit difficult to break free from.

Another observation made is the tremendous amount of traditional instructional talk employed by teachers that is noticeably different from ordinary conversations, both in form and function. The formal linguistic structure of such talk is evident in that there are no contractions, slang or colloquial language use. In a sense, it is very much like speaking in the written mode. The use of modal verbs like 'have/has to' and 'must' also highlights, in a way, the teachers' authority over subject knowledge. Instruction in the classroom seeks to endorse the distinct roles of teachers as authoritative mentors and students as obedient recipients. The exclusive and extensive use of 'you/your' in the instructional talk is seen to create a distance in classroom relationship between teachers and students. Apparently too, instructional talk appears to be the only means through which teachers convey or transmit knowledge and facts. In the classroom, the teachers are seen to be using it unconsciously which indicates that such talk seem to be an established and natural feature in the ESL classroom interaction. As one teacher put it during an interview session, it is the only teaching style possible in the school setting.

One recurrent characteristic in instructional talk observed in the classrooms is the presence of abstract and decontextualised language. In the grammar or even vocabulary lessons, for example, grammatical terms are extracted and then presented to students in isolated and highly technical forms. Thus, students are bombarded with isolated abstractions and technical expressions like 'prepositions', 'verbs', 'nouns', 'tenses'. The language becomes inaccessible to students and the observations show students struggling to understand what is going on, frequently incurring the teachers' frustration. Moreover, only the teachers are seen to be using metatalk while student participation comes in the form of passive listening. At least, outwardly this appears to be so as the students make no attempt to ask questions or offer comments. Thus, in a sense, it is unclear whether students actually comprehend the massive amount of information coming at them all at once.

The importance placed on linguistic forms and structure over meaning seeks to put emphasis on the 'what' of language and largely ignoring the 'why'. Perhaps, this stems from the teachers' desire to get students to speak in grammatically correct language. From field notes taken on conversations and interviews with teachers, they frequently express horror at students' inability to speak 'correctly'. They believe that mastery of the language can only be accomplished if students are drilled into using the grammar correctly.

Another noticeable characteristic about the teachers' instructional talk is the length of instruction. In all six lessons, the teachers' oral instruction has been particularly lengthy and monotonous in the sense that there is no interruption in the form of questions or comments from the students. It is most of the time, a running monologue by the teachers.

Finally, observations show that classroom talk is heavily topic based and form-focused. Interaction is heavily subject based, so that while there are some moments which may have presented excellent opportunities for students and their teachers to engage in active communication, teachers appear very reluctant to deviate from the lesson. Talk is seen to revolve around transmission of facts and knowledge, with very little opportunity for students to use the language spontaneously or freely. The topics have not been exploited or expanded in terms of content and context during interaction. In most instances, the talk is more like oral drills than conversations. Such talk may be seen to promote language at the most basic and rudimentary level and it is questionable whether students are able to apply what they learn at a more complex level. Thus, while the interaction appears to have fulfilled the teachers' teaching goals, it is less clear if it has resulted in language acquisition on the part of the students.

As is stated at the beginning of the chapter, this has been an initial review of the classroom observations carried out and as such it offers but a general overview of the oral behaviour in the ESL classroom. However, the findings do provide a sound introduction to the next chapter which contains a more thorough, detailed and in-depth analysis of classroom talk.

## Summary

The general findings of the review show the IRE pattern of classroom interaction being consistently and systematically employed by teachers in their interaction with students. This pattern is seen to be an established practice and the only way teachers know how to gauge the students' knowledge and understanding of the subject. The strict adherence of this pattern of interaction is also shown to affect student response. It is difficult to miss the passiveness of students in the classroom. Generally, students are found to be very reluctant to respond or participate in class. They appear to lack confidence and show fears of giving "incorrect" responses. Thus, they frequently either not respond at all as found in the higher language classes or they respond together in groups. Another observation is the unconscious and pervasive use of traditional and impersonal instructional talk by teachers, seen to be the only means of transmitting or conveying knowledge and facts to students. Embedded within all this instructional talk is the presence of abstract language where parts of the language are dissected and then presented in separately discreet packages. Moreover, it appears that teachers cannot help but employ such language in their teaching, even though they are aware that it may not be helpful as far as the students are concerned. Finally, classroom talk is found to be heavily subject-based with emphasis being given to language forms and structure. Basically, talk is constrained to looking at specific, pre-determined aspects at one level. The result is context and content reduced interaction which may have fulfilled the teaching goals of the teachers, but have been less effective in enabling students to use the language in more meaningful ways.