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ABSTRACT

Teacher talk can be characterized as a "caregiving" style which has certain identifiable phonological, lexical, and grammatical features. Analysis of classroom discourse can make teachers and students of language aware of the process of communication, and can identify particular uses of nonverbal as well as verbal communication. This, in turn, can help teachers adjust their use of language to pedagogical goals and improve the teaching of language skills and the teaching of general knowledge. Examination by teachers and students of the features of teacher talk as register, discourse, and specialized language of control can help supplement traditional methods of teaching language arts. The following recommendations are made with a view toward observing and analyzing language variation in the classroom: (1) teachers should discuss the language of routines with students; (2) teachers should be conscious of the behaviors of routine that differ for the school as a whole and within their class; (3) students should be asked what can be accomplished when turns are taken in talking; (4) ambiguous instructions should be made explicit whenever possible; and (5) inferences should also be clearly identified as such. (AM)

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LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

ED158575

THEORY & PRACTICE

9

**Teacher Talk:
Language in the
Classroom**
Shirley B. Heath

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Shirley Brice Heath

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TEACHER TALK: LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

*Who knows where our story for today takes place?

I do--Switzerland.

*Good. Now, Jeremy, can you point Switzerland out on the map?

*I don't think you really want to be talking when our guests come, do you?

*I see two boys who are going to be stepping outside in a minute.

Anyone who has been through the formal educational system in the United States will recognize the speakers in the starred passages as teachers and the setting as a classroom. Teacher talk is immediately recognizable. What is unique about the talk of teachers in classrooms? Why does it have specific features that set it apart from the talk of doctors to patients, waitresses to customers, public service personnel to clients, or the general remarks of adults to children?

Studies of classroom language have focused on the communication patterns--both verbal and nonverbal--of teachers and students.¹ Teachers learn these patterns through their own home and school experiences and from reinforcement in their teacher training. Students are expected to learn these patterns before they enter school and to have them continually reinforced at home and in other institutional settings. The patterns are conventionalized; many relate to the use of space and time, and respect for others.

It's clean-up time now!

What are we supposed to be doing?

Why don't you try the method on page 76?

What on earth are you doing?

Is that where the crayons belong?

For those with classroom experience, each of these expressions brings to mind a particular range of situations in which these

directives or requests for action would be used. To be familiar with any of these routines one must have learned (1) the lexical and grammatical features of these structures, (2) the situations in which they occur, and (3) the rules for interpreting and responding to them. Many homes and communities, however, do not share these conventions, and students from these environments have difficulty interpreting the meanings, situations, and rules of classroom language. Teachers are often unaware of the need to make these conventions explicit, because they seem only 'natural' to them.

Descriptions of these mainstream customs and their manifestation in classroom language may therefore seem self-evident to many teachers or mainstream parents. However, the rules that govern these social interactions are neither self-evident nor simple. Description and analysis reveal their complexities and the extent to which their correct interpretation and appropriate response depend on prior experience or explicit translations of their meanings.

To provide a framework for the discussion of classroom language, we need first to characterize it in terms of some of its special features as a 'register' or style appropriate to the particular situation of teaching or caregiving. A register is a conventionalized way of speaking used in particular situations. Numerous registers (baby talk, for example) are part of the linguistic repertoire of members of every speech community, and though they vary in detail from individual to individual, they are recognized and transmitted from generation to generation. A second feature of classroom language is the connected units that make up the 'discourse' or flow of speech in interaction between teacher and students. Teacher or student comments cannot be analyzed in isolation; they must be examined within the context of their occurrence with other stretches of speech. In addition to having particular characteristics of register and discourse, classroom language can be described in terms of the special provinces of control to which many of the 'directives,' or requests for action, refer: i.e., time and space usage, and respect for others

What else can be gained--in addition to helping teachers make their directives more explicit--by the study of classroom language? Are there particular insights to teaching language arts skills in English as well as other languages that can be obtained from analysis of teacher talk? Examination by teachers and students of the features of teacher talk as register, discourse, and specialized language of control can help supplement traditional methods of teaching language arts. Teachers of foreign languages and English as a second language can also benefit from examining their own uses of the special register and discourse features of their classrooms and discussing these with students. Bilingual teachers, who in addition to adopting various registers in their classrooms also switch languages for specific types of interactions, can also gain a better understanding of these strategies. In the following discussion,

suggestions are provided for variations of teacher talk and ways of involving students in the analysis of classroom language.

The Nature of the Talk of Teachers as 'Caregivers'

Language can vary according to user and use. 'Baby talk,' 'foreigner talk,' and 'doctor talk' are registers we can differentiate easily. Linguists view teacher talk as a style of speaking having special features shared with other types of talk used by caregivers. The talk used by parents to children or infants reflects emotional attachment and the goal of instruction (Brown 1977). 'Baby talk' across numerous speech communities--indeed, perhaps all--is a simplified register used to clarify, show expressiveness, and emphasize identification of infant as addressee (Ferguson 1977).

Within their role of controlling standards of citizenship and order, teachers become intimate caregivers to students.² Prior to schooling, children learn from parents, kin, siblings, playmates; they learn few, if any, rules and norms of behavior from strangers. They are warned in particular against strangers who act like caregivers and become solicitous, give directions, or tell them what their intentions should be. In schools, as in other institutional settings (e.g., hospitals), interactions between strangers assuming the role of intimates have to become acceptable. Teachers, nurses, school officials, and counselors are strangers providing guidance in intimate areas of values and behaviors.

The special register or use of language that develops in these situations enables both parties to give notice of their recognition of the circumstances (Greene 1973). Both parties admit that caregivers have to teach things that only they and those internal to the structure of the institution agree should be taught. To project an easy, 'friendly' relationship between caregiver and care-recipient, teachers adopt certain verbal formulae: e.g., "Don't you think it's time you settled down to work?" This formula appears to be a question. However, students who know how to interpret teacher talk will hear this as a detailed directive: "Time has been marked for a specific task; you should do your task in this period of time; if you do not, you are wasting time, and you and your work will suffer as a consequence." Characteristics of the caregiver register are distributed differently across age groups, institutional settings, and between sexes. However, all intra-register varieties exhibit similar prosodic, lexical, and grammatical features. The characteristics of the caregiver's language co-occur regularly enough and are so interrelated that they constitute a register.

Prosodic elements are the most notable characteristics of the speech addressed by teachers to very young schoolchildren. Teachers in day-care centers, kindergartens, and early primary grades use overall high pitch and exaggerated intonation contours in addition to

slow, carefully enunciated speech. There is often much nonverbal reinforcement through facial gestures and body movements. Why are these used? There is evidence that the high pitch may be imitative of what young children themselves produce. In addition, high pitch not only attracts the young child's attention, but it also identifies the talk as directed specifically toward the child and excluding all others. A teacher talking to a parent bringing a young child to school for the first time will shift pitch and contour pattern to engage the child's attention when ending the conversation with the parent. Furthermore, teachers in the early primary grades use high pitch more frequently during the first weeks of the school year, and individually with new pupils coming in later in the year.

Teachers working with children they believe to be deficient in language skills (Head Start programs as opposed to upper-class church kindergartens) use prosodic features extensively. Perhaps they feel unconsciously that prosodic changes clearly mark boundaries between utterances. Enunciating short, distinct sentences in which stress is given to particular words attracts attention and alerts learners to what they are expected to provide in answers to questions: "Tomorrow will be a color day. Our special color will be red." The child is given a cue that answers to questions asked the next day will be about 'color' and should contain the words 'color' and 'red.' Teacher handbooks caution new teachers to speak slowly and distinctly so that they may serve as models for students' speech. Providing students with language for imitation is not the goal of this modelling; instead, teachers' questions point out the slots and fillers students must use to provide correct answers. All these characteristics elicit the child's attention and cooperation in verbal interaction and mark the teacher's speech as learner directed; moreover, many teachers assume that these cues clarify the linguistic structure of the speech and thus help in comprehension and acquisition of language control.

Grammatical modifications in the language of teachers are often more obvious to the casual observer than are prosodic changes. In the early grades, teacher talk is marked by shorter sentences, fewer subordinate clauses, and more frequent repetitions than normal adult-to-adult speech or the language used in higher grades. Teachers in remedial programs for high school students or in vocational educational programs for adults often remark that the speech normally directed to early learners is not appropriate for older students, yet they often slip into it when teaching what they consider simple subject matter. They use full forms instead of contractions, insist on complete sentences, and use 'will' instead of 'going to' to indicate intention. Students interpret these features as signs that teachers are 'talking down' to them.

Vocabulary modifications tend to be determined in part not only by teacher manuals but also by rules of discipline established by the school. In the primary grades, respect for the school, school

officials, teachers, and students is a desired goal, and campaigns are often launched to orient young children to display such respect. Discipline rules are personified. If the school has a campaign to keep a new building clean, admonishments to children about marking on walls or not putting trash in containers will often invoke the symbolism of a mascot or the authority of the principal:

Do you think Giggly Glowworm would be very happy about your desk, David?

What would Mr. Morris say if he could see the floor around the wastepaper basket?

In the higher grades, teachers may substitute 'the boss' or 'the big man' for 'Mr. Morris,' or they may refer students to other authority sources. Handbooks, wallboard messages, and monitoring systems run by peers make real the abstractions of cleanliness, orderliness, respect, and responsibility.

The Nature of Classroom Discourse

Linguists also analyze classroom language as segments of discourse --sequences of units of language arranged to produce interaction for particular functions. Sometimes these functions are straightforward; other times they must be inferred; and on other occasions they may be purposefully concealed from specific parties in the interaction.

Analysis of discourse focuses on the function of units of language larger than the sentence. In general, discourse analysis starts from the premise that most statements carry an informative intent, commands a directive intent, and interrogatives an elicitation intent. However, this is not always the case. Directives may come in the form of questions or statements: "Can you open the window?" "I won't be patient with two gabby girls much longer." Ervin-Tripp (1976) points out the varied forms directives can take in American English. However, all these become functional not as single sentences nor pieces of language, but as connected units dependent upon prior and subsequent units.

Interpretation is highly dependent upon the setting, social relations between speakers, and the speakers' expectations in regard to the situation. For example, the forms of the questions and responses given in the materials below are determined by all of these factors:

And what is your name?

Your name, please?

Belinda Gayle.

Allen Smith.

Why, that's a nice name.

Yes, here it is; right this way, please.

It is not difficult to guess which discourse would occur in a classroom and which would be heard in a restaurant. The internal forms and the intent of each unit vary. It would seem inappropriate for the headwaiter to use a complete sentence in the first unit; it would be rude for the teacher to ask the question as the headwaiter did. The third unit is an evaluation in teacher talk, a directive in headwaiter talk.

Unlike general conversation, in which a series of replies and responses determines the direction (Goffman 1976), classroom language has overriding rules that reflect the teacher's authority to decide who speaks, on what topics, and for how long. Many teachers have a high regard for the conversational mode, yet the goals of instruction and learning prevent them from allowing uncontrolled classroom conversation. Thus they provide rules for discussion, class meetings, or lessons that prescribe for students the limits of their powers of decision making about such talk. Prescriptions for classroom social interaction are given in terms of adhering to norms of order, good citizenship, good manners, respect for others, and the need to adhere to constraints of time and space on talk in the classroom.

Modifications in teacher talk are predominantly in the area of discourse. Questions asked in certain forms, frequent use of 'tag questions' ("--O.K.?" "--right?" "--hmm?" "--isn't it?"), failure to wait for answers, and a predominance of third person pronouns are only a few of the features of discourse found in teacher talk. These modifications are often thought to give classroom interaction a conversational tone, but the use of certain of these and the timing between discourse segments often rule out true conversation. Students who succeed in classroom discourse must stay on the subject and not monopolize the discussion, and they must also recognize special cues indicating when their turn has ended or if their remarks were inappropriate.

For example, in a junior high class discussion of environmental problems, the student who makes the following contribution may get no response from the teacher or other classmates: "I saw this neat program on TV last night that showed all these problems of pollution on another planet in the space age." The absence of a response from other participants signals negative reaction. Youngsters in reading-circle time in the elementary grades must learn that their contributions have to be directly related to the story or have a high interest quotient; otherwise, their conversational participation will elicit no response from the teacher. Students must learn that verbal strictures ("Jerry, now is not the time to talk about that"), nonverbal signals (a cocked head and raised eyebrow), or the absence of a signal are measures teachers employ to control the direction of discourse.

Examination of teacher talk has shown that in the classroom, much

discourse has a tripartite structure, with the teacher offering in the third unit some adjective of positive evaluation.

Teacher: What products did the colonists provide the mother country?

Student: Tobacco, cotton, and lots of other stuff they could grow over here.

Teacher: Good. Now, why were these products important?

What is the relative impact of this formula? Is "good" truly praise, or is it primarily a signal to the student that participation in this segment of discourse is closed? Or is it merely a filler, a space-holder until the teacher can formulate the next question? Is this third unit necessary if it does not serve the purpose of positive reinforcement for the student? Could something else be used in this slot that would encourage the student to offer new information, to think more carefully, or to ask a question? Moreover, if positive reinforcement is used continuously in this type of exchange, what does the teacher say when there is a real need to praise?

Those who study classroom language view its detailed description as necessary for answering these and other questions and for making teachers and students of language aware of what does and does not happen when people communicate with each other. The purpose is to examine these interactions, not to evaluate past practices. In addition, knowing the structure of discourse and the characteristics of register variation used in the classroom helps in the teaching of language skills and testing of general knowledge. Detailed descriptions of how register and discourse work can also help teachers adjust their use of language to pedagogical goals.

What kinds of interrogatives and pronouns are used in general classroom discussions led by teachers? A subsample of data drawn from junior high English classes observed by Kluwin (1977) showed that most questions were introduced by wh-words, and the most frequent type was the what question. Why, how, and when questions occurred much less frequently. The present tense was used most often, suggesting that teachers ask questions about immediate concerns and do not call on students to formulate hypotheses. Most questions sought answers that were labels--names of items, actions, or agents. In another study, teachers who subscribed to the 'inquiry' or 'discovery' approach favored what or who questions in general classroom discussion periods (Heath, in preparation). In small-group work or written tests, however, these teachers asked questions that stressed why, how, in comparison with, and in what context.

Teacher: [Stopping by to work briefly with a group of five fourth grade students assigned the project of preparing a bulletin board showing how language varies] What main ideas will you stress?

Student A: Different kinds of writing and talking.

Teacher: How will you do that?

Student D: We're gonna use cartoons, pictures, and pieces out of magazines 'n stuff.

Teacher: How will you compare types of writing? Will you talk about business letters and literature, or different types of literature?

Student B: We'll do all that.

Teacher: Can you show who writes these different ways and when?

Student A: Maybe we better do a skit, too!

In the habit of leading general classroom discussion, teachers maintained an unconscious preference for questions calling for brief answers--questions that would not allow one student to 'monopolize the floor.'

Teacher: [In fourth grade language arts class, after students had read a series of poems] What do we have here?

[No response]

Teacher: What have you been reading?

Student K: Stories.

Teacher: Is that what they are, class?

Students
A, D, L: No.

Teacher: What are they?

Student A: Poems.

Teacher: Who writes poems?

[No response]

Teacher: L---, can you write a poem?
What makes a poem 'special'?

Student L: I don't know.

A comparison of selected portions of tapes and transcripts of their questions in total class instruction and in small-group work helped

these teachers recognize that their goal in using the 'discovery' approach (i.e., to generate creative and expanded answers) was being achieved only in small-group settings.

The study of teacher language can also focus on particular uses of verbal and nonverbal communication. Are there special ways of showing appreciation, scolding, reviewing, repeating? If so, what are the principles governing the occurrence of these, how do they vary from one type of classroom to another (e.g., open or traditional), or from one grade level to another, or perhaps from one topic area to another? Some teachers use restatement: "Bill has told us the dog doesn't find the bird, remember?" Others ask a question, and after a student responds, they add "Good," "O.K.," or "All right" (as mentioned previously, brief praise is the third unit of the question-response-evaluation pattern). Other instructors provide positive reinforcement by paying attention to the process used in obtaining the answer:

Teacher: Who doesn't get the prize in this story?

Student: Well, I can't tell, because we're not sure whether or not Leann gets the award, and the letter at the beginning of the story--you know, where Don is writing after the contest--all about it to his cousin--tells me Don didn't get the prize either. He tells Ted what happened, and if he'd gotten that prize, he would've for sure told that first.

Teacher: Good! You recognized the value of that letter way back at the beginning of the story as a clue to the actual ending. That's one way writers hold our attention; they introduce clues, and we read the story, in part, to figure out how the clue fits in. But we have to remember the clue as we go along. Have any of you ever played the game "Clue"?

In this exchange, the teacher points out the process the student used to reach his conclusion. She also relates this process to the author's intentions in designing the story. In addition, other students who may have played "Clue" are reminded that they use their abilities to collect, store, and relate facts to reach a final conclusion in situations other than reading lessons.

At the junior and senior high levels, subject areas played a strong role in determining how teachers reviewed, repeated, praised, or scolded, and the extent to which they used direct or indirect physical contact for praise or punishment (Heath, in preparation). Classes in social studies and English contained more discussion of the reasoning process, more latitude for varying interpretations, and more restatements of questions than did those in math or science. In the latter subjects, students were directed to a text or an object when they offered an incorrect answer; they were not fre-

quently given the opportunity to think about their replies or restate them. Instead, they were told to "look at the problem again," "work it through another way," or "check the solution on page 14." Teachers' sentences in math/science classes were shorter, offered students fewer opportunities for interruptions with questions, and focused more attention on specific procedures, prescribed actions, or characteristics of objects than did classes in the humanities. When these analyses were discussed with them, teachers in various classes defined their roles very differently with respect to language. Math and science teachers believed students should be as brief, concise, and precise as possible. Teachers in the humanities courses talked in terms of self-expression, creativity, and style development through multiple approaches to answers.

Discussions based on data collected from their own classrooms helped teachers recognize that some of their classroom language was habitual, nonadaptive, and stereotyped. Science and math teachers admitted that although ideally they wanted students to be able to expand their ideas orally and explain concepts in acceptable expository prose, they had relegated opportunities for acquiring these skills to classes in the humanities. After technical reports and discussions of science/math concepts from local laboratories and businesses were introduced as classroom materials, discussion styles began to reflect teacher and student recognition of the use of different types of language--formulaic and expository, abbreviated and expanded--in the science/math fields as well as in other subject areas.

Perhaps the most important benefit of analyzing discourse in the classroom is the recognition of those nonadaptive features that may have negative value. There are students, such as newcomers or particularly reticent individuals, for whom caregiver register and predictable discourse patterns of question-response-evaluation provide positive stimuli or reinforcement. However, to use aspects of the caregiver register to 'talk down' to an entire group stereotyped as slow or underachieving is nonadaptive. Similarly, to use discourse patterns in science and math classes that allow for little verbal expansion--written or oral--is to operate from the assumption that math and science students lack verbal abilities.

Such talk of flexibility and variation in classroom language and the opening up of formerly restricted opportunities for verbal expression may make instructors fearful of being unable to maintain class discipline. A look at some of the ways teachers preserve control may provide ideas for altering these routines while still preserving a sense of discipline. Or, if individuals do not wish to relinquish these routines, discussion of their implicit meanings may help teachers present them in a more concrete way to students whose preschool socialization has not prepared them for this type of communication.

The Nature of the Talk of Teachers as Arbiters
of 'Good Citizenship' and 'Order'

I hope we shall be friends.

When I am talking to you, I want you to hear.

I am paid to teach you. One of the things I have to teach you is good manners. You are old enough to know better than to....

A Hoosier schoolmaster in the 1860s spoke these words, yet they sound very much like present-day teacher talk. This kind of talk has been a consistent characteristic of American education--indeed probably of all education in formal institutions. The very fact that one individual--the teacher--has to control or facilitate control of a number of individuals leads to the need for special verbal and nonverbal strategies of organization. These strategies are variously called 'good manners' or 'discipline'; they are in reality procedures for predicting certain limits of behavior in the classroom. Students are expected to follow these procedures on cue from ritualistic verbal formulae that incorporate values about how people in a situation of one-to-many should treat each other. Ideally, the specific behaviors to which these formulae refer are known to all, and students as well as teachers recognize them as necessary for managing a classroom in an atmosphere conducive to learning.

Furthermore, the image of the ideal teacher is of a person who wants what is best for the student. This implicit assertion of intimate concern allows the teacher-as-stranger to assign responsibilities and to judge and prescribe intentions and moral choices--areas of behavior generally set down directly by intimates only, or indirectly by abstract codes in our society. As a single figure of control, the teacher must rely on the predictability of responses from students accepting an assertion that he or she will act in their best interests.

Let's be sure we know this.

The grading period is almost over.

I had hoped to have time for some films.

We'll have to get our work done.

The familiar phrase, "You are old enough to know better than to..." reflects a basic underlying premise that many of the routines--and the values underlying them--should not have to be taught. In their middle class/mainstream home socialization or institutional professional education, teachers learn unconsciously or implicitly the following values associated with verbal and nonverbal strategies of organization in the classroom:

- Displays of respect for generalized 'others,' usually in the order of 'school' (either as the specific institution or as formal education in general), school officials, teachers, and students. Ideally, if students place respect for 'school' at the top of the list, then respect for all others will follow automatically;
- The right of the teacher to determine rules and standards of talk in school: who may talk, why, when, how, and where;
- Behavior in accordance with a belief in the value of present tasks--especially those related to competition and evaluation--for future goals;
- Management of time in blocks designated for specific purposes;
- Recognition of specific spaces for designated functions.

Learned in mainstream settings, these values and the behaviors expected to accompany them are associated with certain verbal formulae:

Is that how we treat classmates?

It's time to clean up now.

Is this where the scissors belong?

Remember someone else will be using this book next year.

What's that on the floor?

Is that the way to talk to a teacher?

These routines reflect the tension between individual and group rights in school. Toward students who violate the norms behind these routines, teachers address these cues with the expectation that they will be appropriately interpreted as directives. Understanding the requests for action these routines carry, students are supposed to reorient their behavior. Because routines that maintain discipline are so embedded in the past experiences of teachers, they rarely think of the need to make explicit the rules for interpreting the language of control in the classroom.

Appropriate interpretations of directives are particularly difficult to make explicit. Ervin-Tripj (1977) has identified several types of directives in terms of the social relationships that exist between the person giving the directive and the individual or group to whom the directive is given. The following examples are taken directly from the classroom:

- Statements of personal need or desire:

I need someone to help prepare the new bulletin board.

- Imperatives:

Give me your attention.

- Embedded imperatives:

Can we get ready on time?

- Permission directives:

May I talk to Mr. James without interruption, Billy?

- Question directives:

Have you finished your work?

- Hints:

This room is certainly messy.

These directives are by no means clear. For example, embedded imperatives do not make the task obvious, but subtly refer to the attitude of the addressee, who is expected to recognize in these commands the call to displays of willingness and ability. Embedded imperatives are declaratives as well as questions:

Are you going to check out those slides?

You can clear out the supply cabinet, Mary, and you might want to check the orders, Joe.

Could you straighten out the bookshelves, Tom?

A positive response is expected from the hearer; the assertion of recognition of a compliant attitude is implied in the use of such modals as 'can,' 'could,' 'will,' 'would,' and 'going to.' Interpreting the intention behind directives is often critical to determining the appropriate response. The same statement or question may be interpreted as sarcasm, a request for sympathy, a warning, or a directive. Perhaps the most common examples of this are found in expressions using 'may,' 'might,' 'do you think you could,' or containing the word 'favor': "Ron, do you think you could do all of us a favor--and be quiet?"

In these cases, the intention is to remind the student that he is infringing on the rights of others by putting his own desires ahead of those of the class. To suggest, however, that he would be doing something special, i.e., a 'favor' for the class by being quiet, is to imply the student is ignorant of classroom rules. Other students recognize this implication; the sequence below is a typical

example of the remarks that follow a directive such as that noted above:

Bob: [In response to teacher's comment to Ron] Yeah--
sit down 'n shut up!

Teacher: Bob, was that necessary?

In this interchange, students and teacher are united in chastising Ron; the teacher's comment to Bob is directed more toward Ron than Bob.

The use of tag questions is another common way of neutralizing assertions about intentions, motivations, and responsibility (see p. 6). In the classroom, teachers use tag questions less to request confirmation or agreement than they do to weaken their assertions about moral and ethical attitudes of students: "You knew better, didn't you?" Tag questions are actually declarative in intent; "You don't want that grade to drop this term, do you?" does not call for a response so much as it asserts from the teacher "You should not intend that that grade drop." In 'polite society,' we are not supposed to make assertions about the wants or desires of others. However, in instructional or counseling settings, such assertions seem necessary. Those who use these forms do not expect verbal responses--only eye contact or other signals of attention and respect. In fact, students who supply verbal support to these tag questions are considered disrespectful. Students are also considered disruptive for offering verbal responses to directives phrased as questions:

Are you about ready to hand that in now?

How about settling down to work?

Why don't you check the encyclopedia?

Would you like to come in now?

Students who come from home environments or cultures where questions-as-directives, hints, or tag questions are not used, have to learn--if they are to become acceptable members of the school's speech community--not to respond verbally. They also have to learn the values and behaviors implied in these directives. Teachers who use these devices can help by recognizing when and how often they use them and by making an effort to spell out the values and behaviors behind these routines.

Routines relating to time and space usage are an integral part of the language of teachers. The assignment of segments of time for specific purposes begins early in the formal educational system. Individuals are trained to expect certain events to occur at certain times of the day, and for specific events to follow one another. Head Start and day-care programs reflect this regimentation in the

use of time by the posting of schedules of activities on classroom doors and in the classroom. Parents are asked to talk about the 'wise use' of time and the need to cooperate in such periods as 'clean-up time,' so that the class may move to the next time block.

This kind of training is familiar to individuals from mainstream settings. Here, children have been oriented traditionally to eating at specific hours, sleeping during certain hours, and playing at particular times. The value mainstream society attaches to the proper use of blocks of time is indicated by the fact that the most frequent request for specific information about how 'baby' is doing is a question about whether or not the feeding schedule and sleeping routine have been established. This regimentation teaches children from mainstream cultures to recognize boundaries of time between daily activities. Particular questions, directives, and statements are used to formalize these expected uses of time:

Now is not the time for that.

Your time is almost up.

It's about time for _____.

It's mealtime (naptime, gametime, reading time, etc.).

The speech used in children's games--'times,' 'time in,' or 'time out'--reflects the notion that time is seen as blocks to be manipulated, delayed, suspended, or put into action. A value is placed on 'using' time well by using it for the purpose for which it has been designated. Misuse of one's time is not something that is understood by young children as requiring apology. Older children and adults, however, are expected to understand the need to say "I'm sorry I'm late" or "Thank you for spending your time to do this for me."

Children from mainstream middle class homes are trained to perform in blocks of time; schools and other institutions providing human services stress this as well. Conformity to rules occurs, therefore, insofar as children come from cultures that share the rules related to the use of time as well as the verbal formulae of the classroom. Underlying the acceptance of the need to use time well is a fundamental notion of responsibility to use one's time to the best advantage in order to obtain future benefits and to avoid wasting others' time. Teachers often question unconsciously whether or not an individual who is not conforming to the required use of a time period does so knowingly and intends to involve others in the shift of the use to which that unit of time will be put. Open classroom strategies have weakened these notions, and students are operating increasingly according to schedules they establish for themselves. However, for many the use of time remains a moral issue, a test of character and self-discipline.

Time is money.

Time on your hands.

A stitch in time saves nine.

Space is another unit used for specific functions in school. The organization and use of space in the classroom are critical to notions of discipline. Value-laden terms, such as 'neat' or 'orderly,' are applied to bulletin boards, areas around trash cans, lines of desks, and the work of students. Implicit in the 'correct' or 'normal' use of space in the classroom are the notions of linearity and space-function ties. Many mainstream children grow up in rooms containing units rectangular or square in shape, in which things are kept lined up (either horizontally or vertically) if they are to be considered 'tidy,' and not 'messy.' Arranging objects and work areas in linear fashion reflects general norms of neatness in mainstream institutions. Similarly, specific objects or activities 'belong' in special places. Mainstream parents say the following to their children when they are very young:

Put your books away.

Your coat doesn't belong there.

You want the lines of the spread to be straight.

Line your blocks up, and they will fit in the box.

Many of these expressions are heard in classrooms, as teachers reflect norms of neatness and order. Things are put 'up,' 'away,' 'where they belong,' because "that's how we make the room look nice." Non-mainstream/middle class kindergarten and first grade children instructed to 'put things up' often take this as a literal directive and hold objects up in the air, not realizing that the teacher means that the object goes back in a linear position on 'its' shelf. Explicit directions clarifying these verbal formulae of space usage are necessary for students from home environments in which neither these formulae nor the norms they reflect are part of socialization.

Learning Teacher Talk: Why Study It?

What, then, does it mean to be a speaker of teacher talk? To be a speaker of any language, one must know the rules of sentence formation and how to use the language in different settings and for special purposes among members of the same culture. In the classroom and elsewhere, teachers use utterances to communicate; they as well as their listeners must know the grammar and uses of these utterances in order for communication to take place. Many of the

sentences (or parts of sentences) used in the classroom have particular characteristics: they are fixed in form and do not show the variety of internal structures of messages in other contexts. They are idiomatic, sometimes even idiosyncratic: "Do I have to use my special voice?" "Do you want to take our special seat today, Mark?" They do not carry literal meanings. Many have come to be automatic parts of sequences of sentences. Communication depends on shared knowledge between teacher and students not only about the structure of these utterances, but also about the norms and behaviors to which they refer. If the principles of behavior to which the routines refer exist only in the teacher's mind, it will be necessary to make explicit to students the intent and behaviors meant by these formulaic routines.

Consider the situation of the student as a newcomer in the following classroom episodes that occur within the same day:

[Teacher and students working at a table with boxes and objects of different shapes]

Hold the red box up.

Put the blue circle in the red box.

Hold the sheet of brown paper over the red box.

In this reading readiness setting, the students are learning to deal with a paradigm: they learn to display, to be exact, and, most important--to pay attention to the examiner's actions. They learn to learn by following directions; they probably learn little about the meaning of prepositions--the explicit focus of the lesson.

Contrast the use of prepositions in the following routine expressions as the teacher attempts to maintain classroom control throughout the day:

We've got to get over this habit of everyone stopping at the water fountain on the way to lunch.

Let's put the scissors up now.

Are we all in line?

Hold your work at your desk until reading circle is over.

As part of reading readiness, the child has had specific drills in the understanding of prepositions in particular contexts. Yet these same prepositions occur without explanation in the verbal formulae of control. The child may learn words and the rules of their operation in readiness settings; however, this knowledge alone is not enough to enable comprehension of norms and behaviors implied in certain rituals of routine.

Analysis of the way people teach others in an instructional setting is relevant to the larger question of how children acquire their mother tongue, as well as to the ways in which they learn skills and view the information gained in these settings. Questions sort out for children what it is that adults see as relevant in a myriad of objects to be labelled, described, and manipulated. For example, in many middle class institutional settings, small children told to look at a cloth picture book will see a single item on a page (usually with no context) and be asked "What is this?" "Where is the ball?" "Show me the ball." Rarely will they be asked "What do we do with a ball?" Children from mainstream homes learn early to handle what questions and to recognize that names of things, agents, and events are of major importance to show what one has 'learned.' If the language addressed to children to request information is markedly different from the ordinary conversation of adults or from questions directed to adults, it seems plausible that this difference might help or hinder the child in language development or cognitive categorizing.

The study of the talk of instructional personnel to children should also include considerations of how language varies according to topic, function, and age and sex of listener. If the variation is not random, or if it changes according to regular patterns over the span of the school years, it is not only part of teachers' linguistic repertoires, but it is also part of the stimuli from which students draw in order to determine their own range of registers and their estimations of the respective topics, listeners, and settings for each.

All of these purposes for examining teacher talk seem reasonable. We learn about the structure of the language and its particular uses, and we begin to realize what teachers actually do with language in the classroom as opposed to the use of language in other contexts. Alternatives to unconscious use of teacher talk can come only when teachers are made aware of the structural and functional features of their own language. The goal of change is not only for teachers to shift from a role of direct influence to an indirect one, but to provide them with imaginative alternatives to many of the strategies and routines of classroom that have become fossilized and make teaching and learning boring for everyone concerned. Moreover, the limited and often simplified register of teacher talk has implications for learning strategies, and the observation of register and discourse in context can offer insights to students and teachers interested in the study of the ethnography of communication.

Alternatives and Recommendations

In spite of a strong impetus toward a return to traditional teaching strategies and a curriculum of the 'basics,' many aspects of

alternative approaches to classroom organization may be retained by some schools or individual teachers. Numerous schools moving from traditional to modified or open systems of operation have altered their uses of time and space as well as their standards for noise level and turn taking. Teachers who have adopted both the philosophy and the methods of the open classroom have altered their talk. They do not talk as much as they did before; they have increased their use of the future tense and of second and first person (singular) pronouns:

You will need to schedule your project presentations before June 13.

I don't understand what you're trying to do.

I think Mary is scheduled to use that space for her presentation.

You check the sign-up sheet to see who has supply room duty.

You'll have a tight schedule if you try another project before the end of the term.

~~You'll have to decide about the safety patrol meeting before two o'clock.~~

The use of politeness formulae has decreased; when asked why they no longer said "please," "thank you," etc. as frequently as they had before adopting the open classroom philosophy, teachers answered, "We don't feel we're asking students to work for us. They set their own schedules; lay out their tasks, and determine their project presentations to be given before classmates. None of the process is oriented toward pleasing us or doing what we want. We feel free to express opinions, say what we think, and admit we are not the central factor in their learning."

Approaches to written discourse can be altered as well. At the junior and senior high levels, the format of tests has been modified. The usual procedure is to ask questions of students and request that they provide answers in designated forms (lists, short essays, true or false designations, multiple choices). New tests have been devised that consist solely of answers; the students have to provide the questions. This procedure has helped students focus on information organization and transfer. For example, if the answer given on a test is simply a name, e.g., 'Napoleon Bonaparte,' students have to recognize that there are many questions that could have generated that answer. In providing the possible questions, students may reflect much more knowledge than when required simply to come up with 'Napoleon Bonaparte.' Some teachers have provided short paragraph essays as answers for which students have to provide the best-fitting question. Analysis of these answers has allowed students to utilize their compositional and organizational

processes; the questions have to include clauses or phrases that are appropriate stimuli for each portion of the essay.

Students in higher-level advanced classes and in remedial classes have expressed satisfaction with this approach to information exchange. The majority of middle range students, however, have been very unhappy about this method. Presumably, many average level students have managed in part to maintain their grades by means of their ability to predict the kinds of answers called for by specific types of questions. In other words, they are adept at taking tests and participating in class. Their school experiences have not prepared them for providing questions to answers. On the other hand, both advanced and remedial classes are more inclined to believe most teacher-made questions are unfair or inadequate ways of judging 'what someone really knows' and see this alternative method as a decided improvement. Teachers involved in this answer-question process find that students often see information possibilities never considered previously. Many teachers also judge the procedure far less boring than their usual methods of testing.

Adaptations of this reversal have occurred also in middle level classrooms where language arts, social studies, and math are taught by the same teacher. 'Stores' and 'businesses' are set up around the room, and groups of students are sent to these 'to do business.' Numerical problems (4 @ 29, 6% of \$400, 2-lbs. @ .19) are placed on the board. Students go to the grocery, variety store, or bank to negotiate transactions that fit the problems on the board. Some students are observers; others are buyers, sellers, bankers, etc. Observers have to record the transactions on appropriate forms or in proper formats (receipts for groceries, including prices, totals, tax, and department abbreviations; bank loan notes; charge forms for store purchases). Other observers have to write out the transaction as a 'word problem' or a story, or use a tape recorder to describe the transaction as if they were an 'on-the-scene' TV reporter.

As a result of these activities, language skills have improved; abilities to interpret word problems in math have increased; and language, math, and social studies have become integrated in situations using various language skills. Particular attention is paid by students to the language used by the banker, the TV reporter, or the clerk. Who is courteous? Who is rude? How do observers judge politeness between individuals taking part in the transactions?

Some elementary grade teachers who have participated in programs to analyze their own talk have decided to use the same technique with their students in order to make them aware of the various uses of language and to enable students from non-mainstream home environments to learn in school settings the meanings and rationale of teacher talk. Students have been asked to record (in writing or on tape recorders) the language between Batman and Robin. Their con-

versation abounds with politeness formulae, and Batman excels in the stiff talk of caregivers: short sentences, moral pronouncements, use of the first person plural, full comparisons ("Robin is smarter than the Joker is") and 'will' for 'going to.' In class, these data are used for discussions about language variation: 'polite' talk and ways of talking that don't sound 'right,' 'natural,' or 'like we talk.' Students often make comparisons: "Batman sounds just like Mr. Allen when he talks to one of the sixth graders." Older students have been asked to record the language of Captain Kangaroo and note politeness formulae, direct and indirect orders, real and 'false' questions. Teachers with cooperative (and unself-conscious) principals have recorded portions of their remarks to teachers, parents, and students. Students analyzing these tapes have discovered that even their teachers and parents are sometimes 'talked down to' and have to use certain formulae in particular settings with specific individuals.

The introduction of innovative techniques in language arts, social studies, and even math no longer has to depend on inservice teacher training or summer school courses at nearby universities. The creative use of language--examined, recorded, and analyzed--transfers into new classroom practices. Student assessments of what makes a good teacher reflect the effect of these changes: "Good teachers don't talk down to us." "Good good teachers explain what they mean by 'good,' 'neat,' 'right,' 'straight'; they don't think we are mind-readers."

It is generally recognized--especially by those who have been in classrooms, where they are sometimes outnumbered 35 to 1--that change is not so easy, especially in those areas where predictability is most comforting. However, specific strategies modifying teacher talk help open the way to what are ultimate teaching goals across curricula: assuming an open attitude about learning about language, becoming aware of variations in structure and function, and understanding and accepting the reasons for these variations. The following recommendations for observing and analyzing language variation are not meant to be exhaustive, but simply first steps in this process. Most important, they are introduced here to expand classroom instruction, not to suggest that teachers introduce variation for its own sake.

(1) Discuss the language of routines with students. This tactic applies across grade levels. A social studies unit on the Civil War can benefit from a discussion of the language of military routine; a first grade class can benefit from discussing Captain Kangaroo's talk to Mr. Greenjeans.

(2) Be conscious of the behaviors of routine that differ for the school as a whole and within your class. Think about the different strategies used to deal with misbehavior in the lunchroom: the principal makes a general announcement, but he or she also asks you

to talk with your class. What is different about the language (and the assumptions of responsibility and respect) in the two settings?

(3) Ask the students what can be accomplished when it is someone's turn to talk. Strategies of reversing questions and answers between teacher and students help. Another useful device is to give several individuals an impromptu turn at talking with each other in front of the class for a short period each day, or to give an opportunity to 'take the whole floor' to one individual who has been 'disturbing' the class by talking.

(4) Whenever you catch yourself offering ambiguous instructions ("Straighten up," "Don't leave a mess"); change these to explicit directions.

(5) Recognize when you are asserting a motivation or intention on the part of a student ("You did that just to get out of spelling," "You never intended to bring that homework in, did you?"). If you wish to express an opinion about a student's behavior, do so directly ("I believe...," "I think..."). Accept the fact that the student may have another explanation.

It is obvious that there is no end to the number of alternatives to 'standard teacher talk.' The more we attempt to understand how our messages are structured, how they function, and how they are received, the greater our chances of communicating with students from different environments and cultures. The real test of meaning lies in our ability to be aware of what we have intended in our messages and how we have been understood.

NOTES

1. The study of teacher talk is only one aspect of recent research into the social events of the classroom that examines the social, linguistic, and cognitive events of instructional settings. Students have to reflect their learning within the communication system the teacher establishes. Major research efforts in classroom language began in the late 1960s with the Flanders Instrument Analysis Categories System (1970). Researchers coded units of communication in which the teacher's language stimulated a student response. Analyses of frequencies of coded behavior revealed that teachers did two-thirds of the talking in the classroom. Critical points in the facilitation of decision making were identified in an effort to influence teachers to make their instructional strategies less directive. Recent work has been more qualitative and has emphasized preservation and analysis of the actual classroom language data in order to describe the skills teachers and students use for appropriate interpretation of verbal or nonverbal events. The most comprehensive summary of this type of research on classroom language appears in Mehan et al (1976). Other studies are reported in Stubbs and Delamont (1976), Cicourel et al, (1974), Gumperz and Herasimchuk (1975), and Cazden, John and Hymes (1972). In the bibliography that follows, several citations include research on various types of teacher talk.

2. The findings presented here that are not specifically credited to published studies are based on research conducted at Winthrop College between 1970 and 1975 by myself and by graduate students. Data were collected in rural and urban traditional and open classrooms, day-care centers, elementary, junior and senior high schools. The graduate student research was reported in unpublished papers on the following topics: reading instructional settings in an elementary school (Helen Guinness 1974); principals and teachers in interaction (Vance Bettis 1974); third and fourth grade math and reading instruction in an open school (Judy Adams and Patricia Threatt 1971-1972); mainstream kindergarten (Ann Barron and Mary Watson 1970); monitoring motivations, intentions, and responsibility in reading instruction (Betsy Forrest 1974); modified discourse patterns in open science classes, secondary level (Patricia Norris 1972); opening discussion in a fifth grade social studies class (Margaret Saleeby 1973); monitoring politeness formulae and rules for eating in an elementary school (Barbara Abell 1970). Field notes made by teachers in similar educational settings supplemented

these papers. The data were obtained across grade levels and in varied subject areas and ability groupings by three different methods: (1) observation and participation by team teachers or teacher, and class observer writing down sequences of interactions; (2) audio taping of encounters relating to discipline between teachers and students, or administrators and students; (3) video-taping of lessons on similar topics (organizing an answer, responding to a fire drill). The bulk of the data was gathered by the first method; weaknesses in this form of data collection were in part compensated for by repeated observations of the same classrooms by different students, simultaneous observations by several students and myself, and comparisons of observations of the same teacher or subject area made during different semesters. Ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two communities in which many of the students lived supplemented classroom observations. These school and community data will be presented in expanded form in Heath, Ethnography and Education: Community to Classroom (in preparation).

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