Developing Interactional Awareness in the Second Language Classroom Through Teacher Self-evaluation

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This paper proposes a process model of reflective practice for second language teachers, designed to facilitate a closer understanding of language use and interactive decision-making. The L2 classroom is portrayed as a dynamic and complex series of inter-related contexts, in which interaction is central to teaching and learning. An understanding of the interactional organisation of the L2 classroom is achieved through the use of SETT (Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk) procedures, supported by reflection and dialogue. Naturalistic research methods are used to gain insights into the emerging understanding and interactional competence of a small group of university EFL teachers. These methods are derived, in the first instance, from an institutional discourse conversational analysis methodology; secondly, from action research; thirdly from a sociocultural research perspective. Through a process of guided self-discovery involving dialogue and inquiry teachers are given an opportunity to see their classroom worlds differently, by studying the relationship between institutional goals, as teaching objectives, and the language used to realise those goals. In short, this process of consciousness-raising is designed to redirect teachers' attention away from materials- or methodology-based decisions towards decisions based on interactional choice.

Social Constructivism and Language Learning

A currently held and pretty well-documented view which is gaining both credence and credibility in the field of second language acquisition is that learning (in a formal, L2 classroom context) occurs through talk which is **jointly** constructed by teachers and learners. Under this *social constructivist* theory of learning (see Bruner, 1990; Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985) teacher and learners have co-ownership of the classroom discourse which they construct through goal-directed classroom activities. Even though participants may have different agendas, teachers and learners work towards one common institutional goal: learning the second language. It is this goal-oriented activity that determines both the direction and content of classroom discourse. Instead of seeing the L2 classroom as a context (singular), social constructivist theories of learning offer a much more dynamic, multi-layered perspective of contexts (plural). Interaction patterns can be best understood when attention is given not only to the talk, but also to the pedagogic purpose, the goal behind a particular exchange. Under this view, terms such as high and low teacher talking time (TTT) become meaningless; teacher talk is understood and adjusted according to teaching/learning objectives at a given moment and by recognising that any lesson is made up of a number of contexts, not one.

The quality of teacher talk is more important than its quantity (Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Seedhouse, 1997) and teachers are primarily responsible for creating and maintaining *classroom communicative competence* (cf. Johnson, 1995; van Lier, 1988, 1996). Classroom communicative competence is based on an understanding that opportunities for learning are jointly constructed but primarily determined by the teacher.

In the words of Ellis (1999: 166)

> Opportunities for giving learners control of the discourse will arise naturally in the course of a language lesson. The extent to which teachers grasp these opportunities . . . may well prove more crucial for creating the optimal conditions for learning to take place than any planned decisions they make.

In light of the importance still attached to classroom interaction and particularly in view of the fact that teachers do have considerable responsibility for creating the 'right conditions' for learning opportunities to be realised, it is perhaps not unreasonable for teacher educators to increase their trainees' understanding of teacher talk: comments about high or low TTT will not achieve this end. Reflective practices might include teachers paying more attention to their teacher talk so that interactive opportunities are maximised (Ellis, 1999; Walsh, 2002).

Interestingly, teachers of content subjects like science and maths have been aware of the need to understand classroom communication for some time (cf. Moje, 1995; Musumeci, 1996). In their haste to be 'communicative', it seems that language teachers have overlooked the simple fact that the L2 classroom is a social context in its own right. Instead of trying to make that context more like the 'real, outside world', teachers' time might be better spent trying to understand the interactional processes which create the 'real, inside world' of the L2 classroom. Given that language teachers *sine qua non* are in the business of communication, it would seem, at the very least, desirable for classroom language awareness to be given more prominence. An understanding of the 'interactional architecture' (Seedhouse, 1996) of the L2 classroom may not only enhance understanding of the teaching and learning processes at work – it would, arguably, result in a wider range of opportunities for learning.

L2 Classroom Modes

The present study defines *mode* as an L2 classroom microcontext which has clearly defined pedagogic goals and distinctive interactional features determined largely by a teacher's use of language. The definition is intended to portray the 'interface' (Seedhouse: 1996) between the actions and words, behaviour and discourse which are the very essence of classroom interaction. It is used to embrace the idea that interaction and classroom activity are inextricably linked, and to acknowledge that as the focus of a lesson changes, interaction patterns and pedagogic goals change too. A modes analysis recognises that understanding and meaning are jointly constructed, but that the prime responsibility for their construction lies with the teacher. In other words, pedagogy and interaction come together through talk: pedagogic goals are manifested in the talk-in-interaction. Using the term *mode* encompasses the inter-relatedness of language use and teaching purpose. The four modes derived in the present

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Table 1 The SETT grid

Mode	Pedagogic goals	Interactional features
Managerial	• To transmit information. • To organise the physical learning environment. • To refer learners to materials. • To introduce or conclude an activity. • To change from one mode of learning to another.	• A single, extended teacher turn which uses explanations and / or instructions. • The use of transitional markers. • The use of confirmation checks. • An absence of learner contributions.
Materials	• To provide language practice around a piece of material. • To elicit responses in relation to the material. • To check and display answers. • To clarify when necessary. • To evaluate contributions.	• Predominance of IRF pattern. • Extensive use of display questions. • Form-focused feedback. • Corrective repair. • The use of scaffolding.
Skills and systems	• To enable learners to produce correct forms. • To enable learners to manipulate the target language. • To provide corrective feedback. • To provide learners with practice in sub-skills. • To display correct answers.	• The use of direct repair. • The use of scaffolding. • Extended teacher turns. • Display questions. • Teacher echo. • Clarification requests. • Form-focused feedback.
Classroom context	• To enable learners to express themselves clearly. • To establish a context. • To promote oral fluency.	• Extended learner turns. • Short teacher turns. • Minimal repair. • Content feedback. • Referential questions. • Scaffolding. • Clarification requests.

study are intended not as an all-encompassing description nor as a means to 'code' interaction patterns. Rather, they are presented as a starting-point for understanding, an initial framework and metalanguage for interpreting teacher-fronted interaction in the L2 classroom. By focusing on turn-taking mechanisms and topic management, and by looking beyond the IRF pattern (Initiation – Response – Feedback, see Sinclair & Coulthard (1975)) at longer stretches of discourse, the aim is to provide a descriptive system which teachers can use to extend an understanding of the interactional processes operating in their own classes.

Owing to the multi-layered, 'Russian doll' quality of classroom discourse (Jarvis & Robinson, 1997: 225), any classification is not without its problems and the present one is no exception. Tensions between and within modes do exist: rapid movements from one mode to another, termed *mode switching*; brief departures from one mode to another and back again, henceforth *mode side sequence*; the fact that some sequences do not 'fit' into any of the four modes identified, have all posed problems for description.

The four modes identified, together with their interactional features and typical pedagogic goals are summarised in the SETT (Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk) grid (Table 1).

The framework is intended to be representative rather than comprehensive. The four modes depicted are quite clearly delineated by pedagogic goals and interactional features; while there are some similarities, there are also differences which make description possible. Yet the modes do not claim to account for all features of classroom discourse, nor are they sufficiently comprehensive to take account of each and every pedagogic goal. The main focus is on teacher-fronted classroom practice: interactions that are not teacher-fronted, where learners work independently of the teacher are not described. Rather, the framework is concerned to establish an understanding of the relationship between interaction and learning; specifically, the interface between teaching objectives and teacher talk. In essence, as a tool for teacher education, the framework has to enable teachers to describe interaction relatively easily and unambiguously.

In the remainder of this section, extracts from the descriptive data are used to characterise each mode through a description of its pedagogic goals and interactional features, which were derived (1) from an analysis of the lesson transcripts; (2) from written and spoken comments made by teachers; (3) from validation by independent investigators. Pedagogic goals represent the minute-by-minute decisions a teacher takes, her objectives and desired learning outcomes. They are based on the assumption that all interaction in the L2 classroom is goal-oriented and are demonstrated in the talk-in-interaction of the lesson. Interactional features are the language functions of teacher and learner talk, derived from an analysis of turn-taking and topic management.

Examples of each of the modes are included by way of illustration. (Transcription conventions appear in Appendix A). Teacher's turns appear in the left column, learners' in the right.

Extract 1: Managerial mode

This extract is taken from the beginning of a two-hour class involving a group of nine teachers from Germany, all upper-intermediate. The teacher's stated aim was 'to practise word categories, to teach new vocabulary and to show how this exercise could be adapted for use with the teachers' own pupils'.

32 all right so here in this . . . bundle there are
more . . . right and what you do is one person
from each group will come up . . . er one after the
other . . . take a word . . . read it . . . and try to
decide where it goes now if you're not really
sure or if you've no idea you can guess and write
the word under the category . . . if it's wrong . . .
the other groups have a chance to look it up in
the dictionary but don't call it out don't give me
the answer you can wait until possibly next time
you have a chance to write it up yourself . . . so
you get a point for every correct word in every
correct cat er category is that clear
(Author's data, 2001)

In this mode, the main focus is on setting up or getting feedback on an activity. It is quite normally dominated by the teacher giving instructions or explanations and checking understanding. The communication is one-way, typically with no learner involvement at all. This mode is found most frequently at the beginning of a lesson or lesson stage, or between different stages and is typified by a single, extended teacher turn.

Extract 2: Materials mode

This extract is taken from the beginning of a 90-minute class with a group of eight elementary students from Japan, Spain, Italy, Korea and China. The teacher's stated aim was 'to give vocabulary practice around the theme of sports'.

89 [the match] was . . . what?

90 L: [match]

91 LL: nil nil

92 nil nil (reading) and it remained the same after 30 minutes OF (3)

93 L5: extra time

94 extra time very good Emerson (reading) but then Italy?

95 L5: lost (2)

96 but then Italy . . . what?

97 L5: lost =

98 = lost ok 3 2 in the penalty shoot-out after Venessi and Bagio (mispronounced) both missed

99 L: Bagio (correcting teacher's pronunciation)

100 Bagio yes Spanish (reading) this was the fourth time that Brazil had?

101 = won =

102 = won . . .

103 LL: /won won/

104 the World Cup very good (5) and ((2)) what's that word? ((5))
(Author's data, 2001)

In Extract 2, the interactional organisation is almost entirely determined by the materials and managed by the teacher. Teacher and learner turns are mirrored by the material: the teacher elicits responses (89, 92, 94, 98, 100) and learners respond (91, 93, 95, 101). The sequence is 'classic IRF' (teacher Initiation, learner Response, teacher Feedback), the most economical way to progress the interaction, with each teacher turn functioning as both an evaluation of a learner's contribution and initiation of another one. There is only one turn (99) which is not determined by pedagogic goals, though it is related to it; unusually, it is a learner's correction of the teacher's pronunciation! Very little interactional space or choice of topic are afforded since the interaction is focused exclusively on the material.

Extract 3: Skills and systems mode

This extract is taken from the beginning of a 90-minute class, involving a pre-intermediate group of eight adult learners (aged 19–25) from Spain, Korea, Japan and Jordan. The

teacher's stated aim was 'to prepare for a video-based listening activity using The Lost Secret.

61 ah correct pronunciation anybody?	
	62 LL: prison
63 = prison good right everyone say prison	
65 = good do you understand prison Junya? what is a prison?	64 prison =
	66 L1: I I don't know
	67 L: ((2))
68 last night (laughs) right when the police take you . . . and . . . they lock you away . . . yes I think maybe the American English is penitentiary . . . perhaps that's what you have in your dictionary I don't know but anyway PRIson = (Author's data, 2001)	69 L. = a shallow kind of prison =

As can be seen in this very familiar exchange, the main focus is on a particular language system (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) or skill (listening, reading, writing, speaking). The prime orientation is the language itself, reflected in the work-in-progress and corresponding 'learning talk'. Teacher turns in this IRF sequence are often extended, and consist typically of explanations, confirmation checks, display questions, while learner turns are correspondingly shorter, made up of short answers or requests for further clarification.

There are similarities between materials and skills and systems modes. However, whereas in skills and systems mode the turn-taking is organised around explanations and clarifications which focus on language skills or language systems, in materials mode turn-taking evolves around the materials being used. IRF patterns of classroom communication are apparent in both modes and the teacher is clearly 'in charge' of the ensuing interaction. Learners' involvement is typically restricted to shorter turns related to the materials or language under discussion.

Extract 4 Classroom context mode

This extract is taken from the first 10 minutes of an advanced class of six adult students from Russia, Turkey, Poland and Sweden. The teacher's stated aim was 'to generate discussion prior to a cloze exercise on poltergeists'.

256	L3:=ahh nah the one thing that happens when a person dies ((2)) my mother used to work with old people and when they died … the las thing that went out was the
257 =aha (2)	hearing ((4)) about this person =
258	
	L3: so I mean even if you are unconscious or on drugs or something I mean it's probably still perhaps can hear what's
259	happened (2)
260	L2:but it gets ((2))=
261	LL:/but it gets/there are ((2))/=

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	Le: =I mean you have seen so many operation ((3)) and so you can imagine and when you are hearing the sounds of what happens I think you can get a pretty clear
262	picture of what's really going on there=
263	L:=yeah=
264	L:=and and
	L1:but eh and eh I don't know about other people but eh ((6)) I always have feeling
265 =yes=	somebody watching watch watches me=
266	
267	L4:=yeah!=
	L1:=somebody just follow me either a man or a woman I don't know if it's a man I feel really exciting if it's a woman ((4)) I don't know why like I'm trying to do things better like I'm eh … look like this … you
268 =you think it's a kind of spirit =	feel! it … I don't know=

(Author's data, 2001)

Classroom context mode comes closest to 'everyday communication'. In Extract 4, learners have been invited to share their experiences. The turn-taking is almost entirely managed by the learners, with evidence of competition for the floor and turn gaining, holding and passing which are typical features of natural conversation. The defining interactional feature of classroom context mode, then, is interactional space: extended learner turns predominate as participants co-construct the discourse. Teacher feedback shifts from form- to content-focused and error correction is minimal. In short, the orientation is towards maintaining genuine communication rather than displaying linguistic knowledge. The predominant interactional feature of Extract 4 is the local management of the speech exchange system; learners have considerable freedom as to what to say and when. This process of 'topicalisation' (Slimani, 1989), where learners select and develop a topic, is significant in maximising learning potential since 'whatever is topicalised by the learners rather than the teacher has a better chance of being claimed to have been learnt' (Ellis, 1999: 159).

The framework presented in this section relates pedagogic purpose to language use, enabling teachers to identify 'recurrent segmental patterns or structures' (Drew, 1994: 142) which can contribute to an understanding of what constitutes appropriate teacher talk in a particular mode. This dynamic perspective is intended to avoid the need for bland descriptive systems which adopt an invariant view of L2 classroom interaction. In the data, four modes were identified and described according to their pedagogic goals and interactional features. Managerial mode, where the goal is the organisation of learning, features a single extended teacher turn (usually an instruction or explanation) and an absence of learner involvement. In materials mode, learning outcomes are derived from materials-focused language practice: typically, the IRF sequence dominates, making extensive use of display questions, form-focused feedback and repair. Skills and systems mode follows a similar interactional organisation to materials mode. However, turn-taking and topic management may be less tightly controlled, and pedagogic goals are not derived from materials, but from teacher

and learner agendas. In classroom context mode, on the other hand, learners are allowed considerable interactional space; the focus is on oral fluency, on the message rather than the forms used to convey it. Each mode has its own characteristic fingerprint (Heritage & Greatbach, 1991), specific interactional features which are related to teaching objectives. While the characteristics identified in each mode have a certain uniformity, there is also some degree of heterogeneity (Seedhouse, 1996) determined by the precise nature of the local context and including factors such as the level of the students and the methodology being used.

In this section, the framework was conceptualised for the purposes of describing the interactional organisation of the second language classroom. In the following section, the framework, henceforth the SETT grid, is proposed as an awareness raising tool for the self-evaluation of teacher talk.

SETT: Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk

In the second part of the study, teachers were invited to analyse 'snapshots' of their L2 classes using the SETT grid (see Table 1). This phase can be viewed as a process of reflective practice in which teacher-participants are encouraged to notice, describe and explain the interactional organisation of their L2 classes. Through a process of guided self-discovery involving dialogue and inquiry, the aim is to help teachers see their classroom worlds differently, to 'read' their environment (van Lier, 2000: 11) by studying the relationship between institutional goals, as teaching objectives, and the language used to realise those goals. In short, this process of consciousness-raising is designed to redirect teachers' attention away from materials- or methodology-based decisions towards decisions based on interactional choice.

The study took place in the TEFL Centre, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, between 1999 and 2001. The Centre offers intensive and part-time EFL classes to approximately 400 international students who come from all over the world, mainly from Western and, increasingly, Eastern Europe, and with a sizable minority coming from Asia; specifically, China, Korea, Taiwan and Japan. Students pursue general English classes, exam classes or more tailor- made courses in EAP and ESP. Classes are organised either intensively (15 hours per week) or part-time (2 or 4 hours per week) and at a range of levels from elementary to advanced. Groups are small, with a maximum of 12 students to a class.

Students are taught by 12 part-time tutors who teach up to 15 hours per week on intensive or part-time programmes and meet their class either every day or once/twice a week. Tutors come from a variety of backgrounds and have a range of experience from 3 to 30 years. All have worked overseas at some stage in their careers and all have QTS (Qualified TESOL Status), meaning that they have at least the Diploma in TEFL[1] or equivalent and a minimum of 10 hours' supervised teaching; more than half have master's degrees.

Eight tutors, each with a minimum of five years' teaching experience, agreed to participate in the study. The selection of tutors was based partly on the assumption that experienced tutors are more likely to be in a position to both describe their verbal behaviour and account for it. As Nunan remarks, 'teachers with training but with little or no classroom experience will have a limited store

of schemata [. . .]'. (Nunan, 1996: 86–7). It is the 'schemata', mental representa-
tions of classroom experiences and events, which are crucial to both under-
standing and being able to verbalise that understanding. The selection of
teacher-participants was thus based, in the first instance, on their willingness to
participate; second, on their experience.

The second phase of the study can be regarded as an intervention in which
teacher-participants were trained in the use of the SETT grid via an initial work-
shop and subsequent feedback interviews. The procedures used are summarised:

- The SETT workshop. All teacher-participants took part in the workshop,
  using data from their own classes to raise awareness of the interplay
  between language use, learning opportunity and pedagogic purpose.
- The SETT process (part 1). Subsequent to the workshop, teacher-participants
  were asked to make short (approximately 15-minute) recordings from three
  different lessons and complete a written analysis using the SETT grid.
- Each written analysis included: (a) contextualisation, including teaching
  aims and class profile; (b) identification of the modes used; (c) examples of
  interactional features; (d) an assessment of the features in relation to mode
  and pedagogic purpose; (e) an evaluation of the process.
- The SETT process (Part 2). A reflective feedback interview was held with
  each teacher-participant after each lesson analysed in Part 1 of the SETT
  process. The purpose of the interview was to clarify uncertainties and
  reflect on the process of self-evaluation.
- The interview data were selectively transcribed, focusing on teachers'
  capabilities in identifying modes and interactional features and on the
  reflective practices used to collaboratively construct understanding.

The discussion which follows centres principally on the data collected from
the feedback interviews. In order to triangulate both method and perspective,
the robustness of the findings was strengthened using samples from lesson
recordings, teachers' written comments based on SETT grids and the commen-
tary of independent investigators.

Observations From the Data

This section considers the ways in which the teachers' emergent understand-
ing manifests itself in enhanced awareness via the feedback interviews. Evidence
from the data is presented in a series of observations exemplifying the extent to
which the SETT grid was applied by teachers using their own classroom data.
Finally, there is an attempt to trace the developing awareness of teacher-partici-
pants by considering their use of metalanguage and insights provided into the
interactive decisions taken. The evidence is presented through a series of obser-
vations. (For a detailed summary of the observations and their applicability to
each of the teacher-participants, see Appendix B):

> Observation 1: teachers are able to identify and characterise modes in their
>   own data.
> Observation 2: teachers' use of metalanguage increased.
> Observation 3: teachers' use of critical self-evaluation increased.
> Observation 4: teachers were able to make conscious interactive decisions.

Observation 1: Teachers are able to identify and characterise modes in their own data

Extract 5

The modes that I've identified from my tape are managerial mode because the beginning of the discussion was directing them towards the text and the text subtitle. There was the classroom context mode because I wanted their opinions and feelings about the statement. There was also a bit of skills and systems at the end because I directed them towards vocabulary sets and discussed how useful they are to learn especially for the exam (Teacher 3, Interview 3).

In Extract 5 above, taken from the third feedback interview, the teacher characterises each mode in terms of the 'academic task structure' (Johnson, 1995) and teaching objectives of the moment. While there is little doubt that of the three modes identified, the last two are clear examples of classroom context and skills and systems modes, the first is more dubious, in essence a description of materials mode. The significant points here are firstly, that this teacher is able to identify modes and relate them to her teaching goals; secondly, that there is a recognition that modes vary as a lesson progresses; thirdly, that the teacher has principal responsibility for making interactional choices which determine whether a mode is extended or switched. The teacher's comments in the first extract clearly indicate that modes do not simply 'happen'; they are co-constructed by teachers and learners, with the teacher taking most of the responsibility for 'directing' the progression of the discourse according to desired learning outcomes.

Each of the modes described by teacher 3 has its own distinctive pedagogic purpose: 'directing them towards the text' (managerial); 'I wanted opinions and feelings' (classroom context); 'vocabulary sets' (skills and systems). While it is clear that teachers do not consciously *plan* a lesson according to which modes will be employed, a modes analysis, post-teaching, is a useful means of understanding 'what happened'; how interactive decisions made 'on-line' (Bailey, 1996: 20) are related through talk to teaching and learning objectives.

Extract 6

Classroom interaction appears on the left; teacher's commentary on the right.

T: This morning we're going to be reading about and talking about er music and pop stars and famous people Last Christmas we did a quiz do you remember and it was a picture quiz and some of the pictures were people from your countries. Erm let me see could you work with Ben and could you three guys work together (T organises groups). If you recognise any of those people who they are and what you know about them and then what kind of lifestyle do you think these people have.	*So here I'm setting up the activity so this is managerial and an extended teacher turn. So this is me setting up the activity, more managerial.* *It's a very sort of vague question which is problematic later on but I thought this was . . . I want them to speak to each other but it was kind of problematic, maybe it was too vague . . .*

The teacher's commentary in Extract 6 exemplifies the kinds of problem which might arise when teacher talk, sensitivity to learners and awareness of pedagogic

goals are not aligned. Here, Teacher 4 is setting up an oral fluency practice activity with a group of intermediate learners, using pictures of famous musicians from the students' countries. The 'vagueness' of the instructional language is commented on by the teacher who indicates that this causes problems later in the lesson; in fact, learners did not understand the task and the instruction had to be repeated. The extract is included firstly, to demonstrate that the teacher is aware of the mode (managerial); secondly, and more importantly, to demonstrate his sensitivity to pedagogic goals and language use. In this instance, they are not aligned and the quality of the talk is poor, though the teacher is sufficiently aware of the problem in the post-lesson analysis. Instructional language is inherently problematic; it can, arguably, be made more 'communicative' (Cullen, 1998: 179) – that is, more likely to achieve its intended goal – if it is planned and deliberate. In Extract 6, the instructional language can be described as 'uncommunicative', to use Cullen's term, because of the breakdown which follows.

Observation 2: Teachers' use of metalanguage increased

Extract 7

There were quite a lot of display questions which I think is appropriate for low level classes, pre-intermediate, you tend to use a lot of display questions so I had plenty of examples of those like 'How do you spell exciting?' and then later I was asking questions based on the text 'Does she like Rome?' of course were questions I knew the answers to 'What's the adjective for the noun 'pollution? There would be more referential questions if it was more a discussion with a higher level group so that's one thing that came out. I used referential questions – 'Is your city in China polluted?' – to Lee which enabled them to use a bit more free sort of speech. But these were very limited the referential questions questions to extend or reinforce the vocabulary (Teacher 2, Interview 1).

One of the concerns at the beginning of the study was the absence of a metalanguage both to describe interactional processes and comment on changes in them. If teacher-participants are to become more conscious, more 'mindful' (van Lier, 2000) of the interactional architecture of their classes and learn to make principled use of language, they must have a metalanguage to facilitate reflection, evaluate interactive actions and prompt reaction. Here, the metalanguage is largely provided through the SETT grid and the concern is to assess the extent to which teacher-participants made use of that tool in the feedback interviews.

There are several advantages in being able to use an appropriate metalanguage:

- It facilitates description and reflection on practice.
- It enables new levels of understanding to be attained.
- It allows teachers to construct, interpret and modify their environment.
- It helps direction and control of teaching behaviour.
- It promotes, through collaborative dialogue, changes in practice.

In Extract 7 above, the metalanguage relating to interaction and teaching/learning has been highlighted, confirming, in the first instance, sound awareness that the teacher understands not only what display and referential questions are, indicated by the examples she provides, but also how they function. The comments indicate that the teacher is able to use the metalanguage to

describe the interactional features of this particular mode, but more importantly, to connect her pedagogic goals ('to extend or reinforce the vocabulary') and use of language. Her comments suggest that she is using appropriate teacher talk in the light of her stated teaching objectives.

Extract 8

Display questions were used to initiate a discussion about newspapers and referential questions used (a) to ask learners to express opinions and (b) to find out about newspapers in their countries. I think that this kind of questioning was suitable given that in this part of the lesson I hoped to build 'learner's schemata' prior to a relatively difficult reading and writing comprehension exercise (Teacher 4, written self-evaluation from SETT grid, lesson Extract 1).

There is also evidence of metalinguistic awareness in teachers' written comments, included on the SETT grids. Consider Extract 8, for example, in which the focus is display and referential questions. The comments of the teacher indicate not only that he was able to relate the academic task structure of the lesson, his teaching/learning objectives, to the language used to accomplish it, but also that he has the metalanguage to verbalise the actions taken. Evidence of metalinguistic awareness is a clear indicator that teachers' actions are becoming more conscious, more explicit, that interactional choices are being made deliberately. Absence of metalanguage, on the other hand, not only makes awareness difficult to judge, it creates an impression of reduced consciousness, of impoverished decision-making.

Observation 3: Teachers' use of critical self-evaluation increased

Extract 9

Yes I was very I was aware of (READING) *'turn completion' whether I was finishing things for them or not . . . I've become more aware of that recently and try not to do it* (Teacher 3, Interview 1).

I think maybe 50% of mine [teacher echo] are for a good reason and 50% of it is real habit they give me an answer and I answer the answer. I'm kind of trying to cut down on a bit (Teacher 5, Interview 1).

Also, I noticed that there was quite a lot of extended teacher turn maybe too much you know when I was listening to it perhaps there were one or two occasions when I needn't have used it (Teacher 2, Interview 1).

Critical self-evaluation, based on teacher-generated data, is of considerable value as a process of consciousness raising and enhancing understanding. Using a framework (like the SETT grid), teachers are able to make a finer-grained analysis of their decisions and use of language in relation to the modes identified. Their observations are voiced to an independent listener who has no evaluative role, as is often the case during a post-teaching feedback interview. Note too that the process eliminates the need for lengthy transcription of class-based recordings; with a task to focus attention and selective transcription, awareness can still be

enhanced to a considerable extent. Time and energy can be spent on the process of gaining understanding rather than transcribing class recordings.

It is apparent from the interview data that, even from the first feedback interview, teacher-participants very quickly notice their verbal behaviours. Other researchers have commented on the need to get teachers to *experience* their behaviour as the first step in bringing about change (Harmer, 1999; Thornbury, 1996). One of the central proposals of the present study is that teachers can only start to notice and make changes to interactional practices if they are focused on their own data. Noticing and explaining are key stages in a process of co-constructed understanding; they can only occur when teachers are able to interact with and learn from self-generated data.

In Extract 9 above, a range of brief evaluative comments is included by way of illustration of the importance of self-appraisal in reflective practice. They are all taken from the first feedback interview with three different teachers. Each extract contains comments made in relation to the modes identified. They indicate quite clearly a reflective process of noticing (e.g. 'I was aware'; 'I noticed'), evaluating ('50% of it is a real habit', 'I needn't have used it') and setting new objectives ('I try not to do it'; 'I'm trying to cut down'). This *reflective cycle* is of considerable value both as a means of demonstrating awareness and as a procedure for self-help, providing it is supported with the follow-up interview which is essential in order to clarify or re-align misconceptions.

Observation 4: Teachers were able to make conscious interactive decisions

Extract 10

I think if you do a form-based class obviously with an intermediate group anyway there should be a lot of display questions at the beginning the warm-up you're eliciting and not just for them to figure things out for themselves but also from the teacher's point of view to know what they know (Teacher 5, Interview 3).

One of the concerns in the second phase of the study was to make teacher-participants more conscious of the interactive decisions taken in the moment-by-moment unfolding of a lesson. As demonstrated by previous research (Ellis, 1999; Gatbonton, 1999), interactional decisions can have an adverse or positive effect on learning opportunities and teachers need to be sensitised to this. Furthermore, within the parameters of the SETT grid, there is scope in the feedback interview to explain why certain decisions were taken and analyse their effect on the lesson.

There is evidence in the data which illustrates the extent to which interactional decisions reflect an alignment between pedagogic goals and language use, exemplifying verbal behaviour that is mode convergent. In Extract 8 above, for example, the teacher justifies a decision to ask display questions in a warmer activity. The lesson extract on which the interview is based is an intermediate level class and the focus of the lesson is modal verbs. Examples of display questions taken from the recording include: 'Do people in Germany wear those trousers?' 'Do you know what we call those hats?' She provides three reasons for the decision: as a means of focusing on form; to give learners an opportunity to think for themselves; to provide essential feedback to the teacher. Her comments underline an interactional aware-

ness which is manifested in the decision taken during the lesson and then verbalised quite clearly in the feedback interview. This kind of consciousness is central not only to creating learning opportunities, but also to the reflective practices of this study. Again, the self-evaluation using an appropriate tool and the subsequent feedback interview are important components in this process.

Extract 11

Sometimes I interrupted to change the mode, to change from one part of the lesson to the next to move on, but I also interrupted in several stages when they were talking to each other about things that I knew something about and I wonder about the value of that because in one way it sort of added to the easy-going atmosphere, but in another way, even though what I said added to the conversation, maybe it wasn't my part, wasn't my role (Teacher 4, Interview 2).

In Extract 11, the discussion centres on teacher interruptions. Teacher 4 attempts to justify decisions taken to interrupt learners during a classroom context mode where a group of intermediate learners were discussing favourite films. Two aspects of this extract are of interest to the present discussion. Firstly, there is again an indication that the teacher is able to justify the interactional decisions taken during the course of a lesson; secondly, there is an evaluative dimension to the comments, with Teacher 4 expressing some concern about his precise 'role' in the interaction. Put simply, while Teacher 4 is able to explain *why* a particular decision was taken, he is also able, at a slight distance and on reflection, to question the validity of that decision, to assess its educational 'value'. Standing back from an interactional moment and commenting on its appropriacy is highly relevant to the self-evaluation process, a crucial aspect of *reflecting in action on action* (Schön, 1987).

The notion of the teacher as decision-maker is certainly not new (see e.g. Bailey, 1996; Scrivener, 1994). Many pre- and in-service L2 teacher education programmes address the process of methodological decision-making in the post-practice feedback interview. The notion of helping teachers to understand and rationalise the *interactional* decisions taken in the course of a lesson is something different, focusing as it does on the relationship between language used and teaching/learning outcomes. It is, arguably, equally important and yet neglected. Once a variable perspective of classroom interaction is adopted, interactional decisions become much more straightforward: teaching and learning objectives are aligned with the *language* used to achieve them rather than the teaching method, giving a totally different understanding of the decision-making process.

To conclude this section, several extracts from the data are presented to indicate the extent to which teacher-participants' interactional awareness developed over the period of the study. These comments are taken from the final part of each of the feedback interviews, when teacher-participants were asked to comment on the SETT process and give their evaluation.

Extract 12

I'm noticing it (verbal behaviour) *in the CLASS as well as I'm speaking. I'm noticing it a lot. I don't know how much I may have changed from when I started to listen to myself but I can see that they do fit into particular modes* (Teacher 3, Interview 3).

Extract 13

I think in order to CHANGE, it would probably need to be, there would probably need to be an external AGENT to look at it; someone would need to be more interventionist because people SEE things from outside that people in the middle of a thing don't see (Teacher 4, Interview 3).

Extract 12 highlights the importance of 'noticing', the first step in being able to describe interactional processes and to making subsequent changes. Measuring change and reacting to perceptions of current practice is more difficult, an observation echoed by Teacher 4 in Extract 13. Comments in both these extracts certainly strike a chord and raise a number of questions. The thinking behind the feedback interviews was that they would, in the first instance, provide a 'sounding board' for teacher-participants to try out new ideas. Yet educational change is notoriously complex to both achieve and measure. Not surprising then that Teacher 4 comments on the need for a 'change agent', a third party who is able to influence and evaluate changes in verbal behaviour. Equally, however, the original intention was for self evaluation, on the understanding that innovation is more sustainable if stakeholders have ownership. It would have been perfectly feasible, in other words, for the researcher to have given more input, more 'guidance' but this was seen as self-defeating. Rather, the aim was for teachers to grow in their own expertise and understanding of the interactional organisation of their classes, through a process of reflection and action firmly founded in dialogue.

Extract 14 (Teacher 1, stimulated recall interview)

It's certainly made me think more about my teacher talk. It's made me think about teacher talk as something that isn't all of a oneness, as something that has disparate elements in it because you do tend to think of teacher talk time and think I'm talking too much, I'm talking too long. When you start doing this, you realise there's very appropriate teacher talk and there's less appropriate teacher talk. You become more analytical about it.

In Extract 14, Teacher 1 comments on the 'disparate elements' of teacher talk; the fact that it cannot be considered as 'one' single feature; the fact that teacher talk may be more or less 'appropriate' according to teaching purpose. Implicit too in her comments is the suggestion that, through analysis, awareness can be raised as to what is 'appropriate' and when; in other words, that interactional features are differentiated and used differently according to mode and that the whole interactional framework of the L2 classroom is in a constant state of flux.

One of the interesting trends emerging from the teachers' reflective comments is their increase in consciousness, a heightened awareness, both retrospectively, through self-evaluation, and in the thick of the teaching moment when interactive decisions are taken. All kinds of decisions are made in response to the unfolding L2 classroom interaction; typically, when asked to comment on their performance in post-lesson feedback interviews, teachers make reference to decisions taken with regard to a particular activity, piece of material or learner. In the interview data, it is quite apparent that the focus of decision-making has shifted very much to the ways in which decisions are taken in accordance with perceptions and observations of the unfolding discourse. In other words, instead

of being rooted in classroom methodology, decisions were being taken in response to an emergent understanding of the interactional processes which had become visible through the process of SETT.

In extract 15 (see below), for example, Teacher 3 comments on the changes which have occurred in her own teacher talk and her 'conscious' awareness of teacher echo at different levels. Equipped with a common metalanguage and a basic training in the self-evaluation of her teacher talk, this teacher is able not only to observe changes in her use of language, but also to comment on those changes and evaluate their overall usefulness. Arguably, it is unlikely whether, prior to her involvement in the study, she would have (a) noticed the changes; (b) been able to verbalise them so precisely; (c) had the self-awareness to judge their value. Acquiring the metalanguage and understanding its meaning was a crucial part of the process, enabling new meanings and understandings of interactional phenomena to be co-constructed.

Extract 15 (Teacher 3, stimulated recall interview)

How my use of language has changed? Maybe a little more direct repair and saying 'no' when it isn't correct and because before I would hesitate and go around it a lot and say 'well yes maybe sometimes that's ok' but really it's not but you feel you shouldn't put people down. I'm much more conscious of teacher echo. It's sometimes a habit because with this level I think it helps, I think it's necessary and it's good, useful. But if when I'm with the Proficiency group and I do it, then I think 'no don't do that' because at this level they should be really pushed to understand each other and if they don't understand each other, they should be at the level as well of being able to say 'can you tell me that' so then I'm much more aware of it and try not to do it. Teacher interruption as well, I try not to that as much as before.

Conclusions

The present study has depicted the L2 classroom as a complex, dynamic and fluid blend of micro-contexts, created, sustained and managed by the interactants in their pursuance of goals. That goal-oriented activity is shaped by and for the work-in-progress of the lesson; teachers and learners adjust their use of language according to the task in which they are involved. Four modes were presented, characterised by their pedagogic goals and corresponding interactional features By learning to understand the interactional organisation of each mode, teachers can train themselves (or be trained) to appreciate that language use and pedagogic purpose are inextricably linked and that teacher talk varies according to mode. The conversation analysis methodology used enables description of the interaction by examining the turn-taking mechanisms. How might that methodology be developed to give clearer, more representative descriptions? What alternatives are available for offering variable descriptions of the interaction? How do the descriptions differ when alternative modes or classroom micro-contexts are identified? Questions such as these need answers: the key to understanding interactional processes is in describing them. At present, L2 classroom research is only beginning to offer descriptions which are both plausible and usable in extending awareness. There is still much more work to be done, especially in identifying ways of enabling teachers to access the interactional

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processes of their classes and of making description and understanding part of their day-to-day teaching.

Appendix A: Transcription System

The transcription system is adapted from van Lier (1988) and Johnson (1995). Language has not been corrected and standard conventions of punctuation are not used, the aim being to represent 'warts and all' the exchanges as they occurred in the classroom. Many parts of the transcripts are marked *unintelligible*; it should be noted that the lessons were recorded under normal classroom conditions with no specialist equipment. Consequently, background noise, simultaneous speech and other types of interference have, at times, rendered the recordings unintelligible.

T:	–	teacher
L:	–	learner (not identified)
L1: L2: etc,	–	identified learner
LL:	–	several learners at once or the whole class
/ok/ok/ok/	–	overlapping or simultaneous utterances by more than one learner
[do you understand?] [I see]	–	overlap between teacher and learner
=		turn continues, or one turn follows another without any pause.
. . .	–	pause of one second or less marked by three periods.
(4)	–	silence; length given in seconds
?	–	rising intonation – question or other
!	–	emphatic speech: falling intonation
((4))	–	unintelligible 4 seconds a stretch of unintelligible speech with the length given in seconds
Paul, Peter, Mary	–	capitals are only used for proper nouns
T organises groups	–	editor's comments (in bold type)

Appendix B: Application of Observations to Each Teacher-participant

The 'X' indicates that the observation was found to be applicable to the teacher indicated. Blanks indicate that there was no evidence in the data to indicate that a particular observation applied.

	Observation 1	*Observation 2*	*Observation 3*	*Observation 4*
Teacher 1	X	X	X	X
Teacher 2	X	X	X	
Teacher 3	X	X	X	X
Teacher 4	X	X	X	X
Teacher 5	X	X	X	X
Teacher 6	X	X		X
Teacher 7	X		X	
Teacher 8	X		X	X

Observation 1: teachers are able to identify and characterise modes in their own data
Observation 2: teachers' use of metalanguage increased
Observation 3: teachers' use of critical self-evaluation increased
Observation 4: teachers made more conscious interactive decisions

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Note

1. The Diploma in TEFL is an in-service teacher education qualification validated by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. It is aimed at teachers with a minimum of two years' teaching experience.

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