

Observations on Teachers' Knowledge Growth in the Communicative Approach in Taiwanese EFL Classes

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This paper aims to illustrate how the observation scheme was developed and helped evaluate the extent to which the teachers' practitioner knowledge in adapting the communicative approach (CA) develops. The CA, including communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), has been strongly promoted by professionals in the area of second language (L2) teaching and learning. It has also been embraced by national curriculum guidelines in many countries where English is taught as a foreign (EFL) or second language (ESL). However, it is not widely accepted in teachers' practice. An action research study was set up to help teachers develop and implement a context-sensitive CA in a Taiwanese EFL secondary school. To observe teachers' knowledge growth in the CA, a systematic observation scheme was developed. This was done by firstly clarifying what CA, CLT, and TBLT mean, then identifying the key principles which are informed by theories related to L2 learning and cognitive psychology, and finally, comparing the criteria with common cited observation schemes and giving consideration to contextual factors. The scheme was applied to observe three volunteer teachers once a month and trace their knowledge growth for five months. The scheme effectively captured insights into this growth. It is believed that this framework can also be applied to other settings where a gap exists between the governments' expectation and the classroom reality.

Keywords: communicative approach (CA), communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), teacher education, teachers' knowledge, teachers' beliefs

Introduction

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been a focus of active research and publication since the 1980s onwards, and subsequently, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become a new focus and highly popular (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). To enhance national competitiveness, many countries, where English is taught as a foreign (EFL) or second language (ESL), have reviewed their curricula and embraced the communicative approach (CA), including CLT and TBLT, as the main focus of their curriculum guidelines (Nunan, 2003; Littlewood, 2007). Despite the status that CLT, and now TBLT, have achieved, it is not always widely accepted in teachers' practice. The existence of a considerable gap between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality appears to be a common phenomenon, shown as early as the 1990s in, for example, the work by Li (1998), then in the early 2000s work by Nunan (2003), and more recently by Carless (2009).

This research aims to explore whether reflective action research through a teacher development program can help teachers in adapting the main features of the CA to their own appropriate pedagogy within their

context. Taking a view that teacher learning involves mental cognition, such as teachers' knowledge and beliefs, it is reasonable to assume that an indicator of development in a teacher's knowledge in the CA would be to evaluate whether the teacher acts consistently in accordance with their expressed (or "espoused") beliefs. Observing teachers' practice is one of the most common methods to collect data about teachers' knowledge (Bartels, 2005). In addition, observation plays a particularly important role in reflective action research since it can provide the documentary evidence for later reflection and evaluation (Burns, 2010).

Teachers' knowledge is often viewed as the superordinate to teachers' beliefs, and the two are mutually informing (Borg, 2006). In this paper, the term "knowledge" refers to both, including all a teacher believes or knows to be true, which guides his/her practice. In particular, the focus is on "practical knowledge" (Elbaz, 1981) and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) due to their more personal nature. The term "practitioner knowledge" is used to include practical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in this study, since they are central to "knowledge how" or implicit knowledge (Richards, 2008). This article will focus on how a systematic observation scheme was developed and applied to analyze the teachers' pedagogical activities, and finally helped evaluate the extent to which the teachers' practitioner knowledge in adapting the CA develops.

The Features of the CA

The observation scheme was developed by firstly clarifying what CA, CLT, and TBLT really mean, and then identifying the key principles; it was also informed by second language (L2) learning theories and cognitive psychology. Consideration was also given to contextual factors. The elements in this framework are outlined below.

Primary Focus-on-Meaning (FonM)

"Primary FonM" has been highlighted in the key work of CA, CLT, and TBLT. Savignon (1990) claimed that the aim of CLT is to promote the development of L2 functional competence through learner participation in meaningful communicative events. In Skehan's (1996) definition of task, he put meaning as primary. Ellis (2003) also pointed out that a task should give primary attention to meaning.

This principle of the CA requires engaging learners primarily in a meaning-focused activity, whether there is any instruction on form during or after the activity (as in a weak version of CLT/TBLT) or not (a strong version of CLT/TBLT) (Ellis, 2003; Dörnyei, 2009). The weak version of CLT/TBLT is compatible with a view that form can be or is best learnt in a meaningful context, as suggested by the majority of the experts in this area (e.g., Long, 2000; Ellis, 2003; Dörnyei, 2009). The emphasis on meaning as primary (e.g., Long's (2000) focus-on-form (FonF) teaching mode) has a strong theoretical base in the discussion of implicit and explicit L2 learning as illustrated in the work by Ellis (1993) and Dörnyei (2009).

Any view of meaning takes the dynamic nature of classroom discourse into consideration. Meaning is communicated in the flow of interaction (Johnson, 1995); it can be developed in the process of interaction and co-constructed with learners in teacher talking time (TTT). As Allwright (1981) pointed out, it is the language input generated in such processes that has the potential for learning to happen, rather than the input prepared by the teacher. This view was also shared by Ellis (1993) and Long (2000), who referred to the concept of "internal syllabuses". Teachers are advised to reduce TTT and increase student talking time (STT). However, the author's view is that teachers should increase the quality of their talk. Higher quality of teacher talk can maximize learners' involvement and result in more active participation when teacher talk encourages and

invites more students' turns (Walsh, 2002). This relates to the well-known concept that CLT or TBLT are associated with pair/group work. To co-construct meaning, a task can be incorporated with some "gap" which would motivate learners to communicate in order to close it, for example, information, opinion, and reasoning (Ellis, 2003). However, Littlewood's (2004; 2007) observation framework views meaning as more static. In his communicative continuum, activities are categorized by degrees of FonFs and FonM in the design itself, without considering the dynamic nature of co-constructed meaning. Therefore, his continuum only helps evaluate teachers' knowledge growth in designing activities.

Learner Participation

Learner participation in interaction is a key feature not only among various definitions of CLT and TBLT, but also in the literature regarding the theoretical bases of the CA, including the output hypothesis (Swain, 1985), interaction hypothesis (Long, 1983), and sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000). Learner involvement is crucial, as D. Willis and J. Willis (2007) commented, "without engagement, without genuine interest, there can be no focus on meaning or outcome. Learners have to want to achieve an outcome, they have to want to engage in meaning" (p. 13). Even authentic communication activities are hardly communicative when learner involvement is low. Littlewood's continuum neglects the dimension of the degree of learner involvement and, thus, cannot be used alone for the observation schemes (Littlewood is aware of this in his article in 2004). Just as the first feature discussed above, this feature is also a matter of extent, a view shared by Skehan (1998).

Participation and interaction can be facilitated either by teachers' interactions with their learners in TTT or by pair/group activities which teachers design for communicative purposes. A framework to assess this item needs to take into account the dimensions of both the design/plan and the process of the pedagogical activities, i.e., to take a more holistic view. The extent of interaction and involvement of a pair/group activity including tasks can be evaluated by the design of the activity itself as the first step. This can be done by considering whether the activity requires learners to interact with peers. Individual work does not involve interaction and, thus, is excluded from the CA. Only pair/group work has the potential to create opportunities to interact. However, the way in which students really operate the activity does not always conform to the teacher's expectation; the teacher may need to adopt certain strategies to promote learners' engagement in the activity.

Outcome of the Task

Although various definitions of tasks have been put forward, outcome is the most common feature among these. Breen (1989) defined task as a "workplan" consisting of three elements: goals/outcome, content, and procedure. While Breen employed the term "workplan" to refer to a range of purposes, from simply exercising a form to more complexly using L2 in solving problems, more scholars (e.g., Nunan, 1991; Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996) specified the goal of a task to be meaning-focused language use. According to Willis's (1996, p. 23) definition, tasks are "always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome". For the spot-the-difference task, the outcome is to identify all the differences between two pictures. The outcome is evaluated by the extent to which the target language used in the interaction with peers that promotes language acquisition (Ellis, 2003).

These three main criteria used in the framework, namely, primary FonM, interaction and involvement, and a goal, have covered other elements which are frequently believed to feature in the CA. For example, student-centeredness is frequently a criterion for the CA. It is unlikely that teaching can be teacher-centered and, at the same time, meet the second criterion (e.g., by encourages learners to initiate and participate in

meaningful communication in L2). "Relate to the real world" is also frequently highlighted in tasks (e.g., Ellis, 2003; D. Willis & J. Willis, 2007; Skehan, 1996). Long (2000) saw tasks as referring to the real-world things people do in everyday life, for example, buying a bus pass, asking for directions, etc.. A workplan, including an activity like this, is creating some sort of relationship to the real world. Even though a task may be less authentic, such as "describing a picture so someone else can draw it", the skills that the learners learn while they are negotiating their way to understand each other, i.e., interactional authenticity, would contribute to their skills in dealing with real-world activities (Ellis, 2003, p. 6). In addition, meaningful interaction between the teacher and the students simulates the authentic meaningful exchange of the real world (Tomlinson, 2014). Thus, these three selective criteria contribute to the real-world language use.

The framework for this study does not include "using authentic materials" due to the fact that textbooks often play an important role in EFL contexts (Richards, 1998). However, if teachers choose to introduce authentic materials, this will be noticed.

Methodology

Research Design

This study aims to assist EFL teachers in this context in developing and implementing a context-sensitive CA. Therefore, the research aim is to explore how the teachers' practitioner knowledge in adapting the CA develops. The method of enquiry chosen is action research due to its suitability in bridging the gap between theory and practice within practitioners' own contexts (Cain, 2011). In order to address the above research question, two data collection paths were adopted: Path A was to observe their classroom practice; Path B was to listen to their reflections on their beliefs by means of interviews. This article primarily focuses on Path A. The researcher consistently juxtaposed the interview data related to their beliefs with classroom observation data. If there is a synergy between their practice and beliefs, then it means that their practitioner knowledge of the CA has been developed (Wyatt, 2009).

Research Background

According to Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, and Son (2007), a number of studies have shown that traditional methods still predominate in certain EFL context. A similar conclusion was reached in Savignon and Wang's (2003) study in Taiwan. In the context of Taiwan, there are two semesters in a school year. This study was conducted in the first semester, which started from early September 2013 and finished in the mid of January 2014.

Participants

This study involves three volunteer teacher participants and one class of their students (aged from 14 to 15) with average 30 in number. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper. All the teachers acquired degrees from a Taiwanese normal university. Dian has taught English for 14 years and holds Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) and Master of Arts (M.A.) degrees in education. Wendy has 12 years of experience in teaching English and has a degree of B.A. in education and English and a diploma in postgraduate study in linguistics in the United Kingdom. Ken has 10 years of teaching experience and holds a B.A. degree in English and a M.A. degree in media design in the United States. While Dian and Wendy both had 14 teaching hours a week, Ken had 20. The teachers were aged from 33 to 38.

Ken and Wendy both received training related to CLT in a normal university in which pre-service courses

were provided. Wendy also received CLT courses in a summer postgraduate program. These courses, reported by Ken and Wendy, are similar to pre-service courses in general, which according to Richards and Farrell (2005), are fairly generic in nature and theoretical, but inadequate in preparing future teachers with what they need to know for the job. Wendy commented that CA was the focus in her summer program, but was rarely related to practice. Therefore, for her, "It is only a theory".

The Observation Instrument

Drawing on the relevant literature, also informed by the interdependence of interaction, input, output, and the need for negotiation for meaning and participation, two key elements featuring CA are believed sufficient for assessing teacher talk and activities: (a) whether there is a primary FonM; and (b) the extent to which interaction and involvement are observed.

One more criterion for evaluating a task is whether there is a communicative goal for learners to achieve.

These three features are applied in analyzing classroom talk and pair/group work, the design, and the process. Putting these three criteria in a diagram, the observation scheme is illustrated in Figure 1.

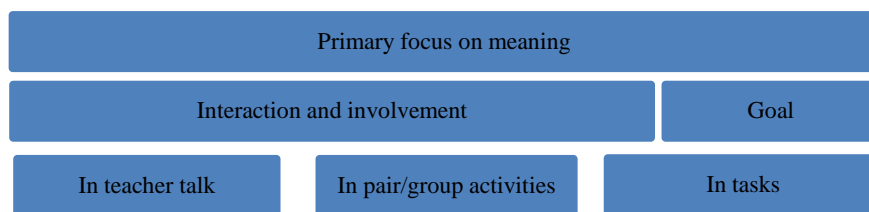


Figure 1. The observation scheme.

The framework for observing interaction and involvement in teacher talk and activities respectively is summarized in Figure 2.

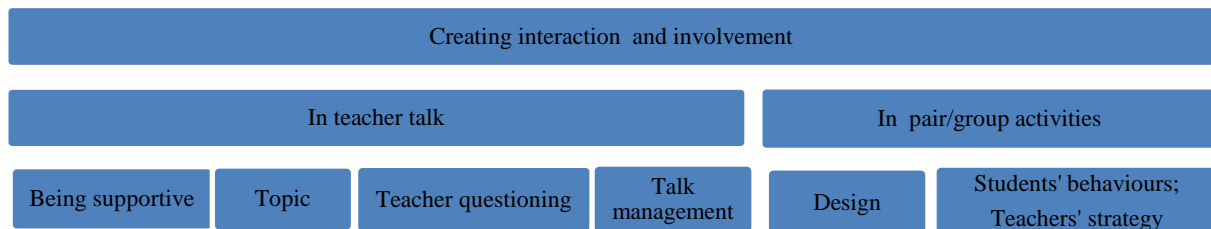


Figure 2. The framework for observing interaction and involvement.

In the process, in order to obtain data from observing the teacher and students' behaviors in the pair/group activities and the context in general, the following observation sheet was developed (see Table 1).

Taking the view that classroom discourse is constructed by all the participants in a classroom, an inductive approach was taken to analyze how the teachers in TTT facilitated learner participation in interaction. That is, any interpretation was generated bottom-up from the data. However, an inductive researcher comes with an open mind, not an empty head (Dey, 1993). It is still necessary to understand in general what the literature has to say about the features of TTT, which can increase learner participation in interaction and, thus, create more opportunities for learning. The common themes are: being supportive, topics, teacher questioning, and talk management. Nonetheless, these that are not treated as imposed categories defined a priori onto the data being studied.

Table 1

Observation-Behaviour and Strategy Sheet

Activity Students' behaviour	Observed group (In every one minute)	Teachers' strategies/note	Result to teachers' strategies
Activity: Task A	Eight groups	-	-
Talk in L2	Three groups	Students interact actively	-
Talk in first language (L1)	Two groups	Reminding the students	The students start using L2
Silent	One group	Walking towards them	-

Note. Source: Adapted from Martínez and Arce (2008).

Combined with the framework for observing interaction and involvement, the observation scheme is illustrated in more detail in Figure 3.

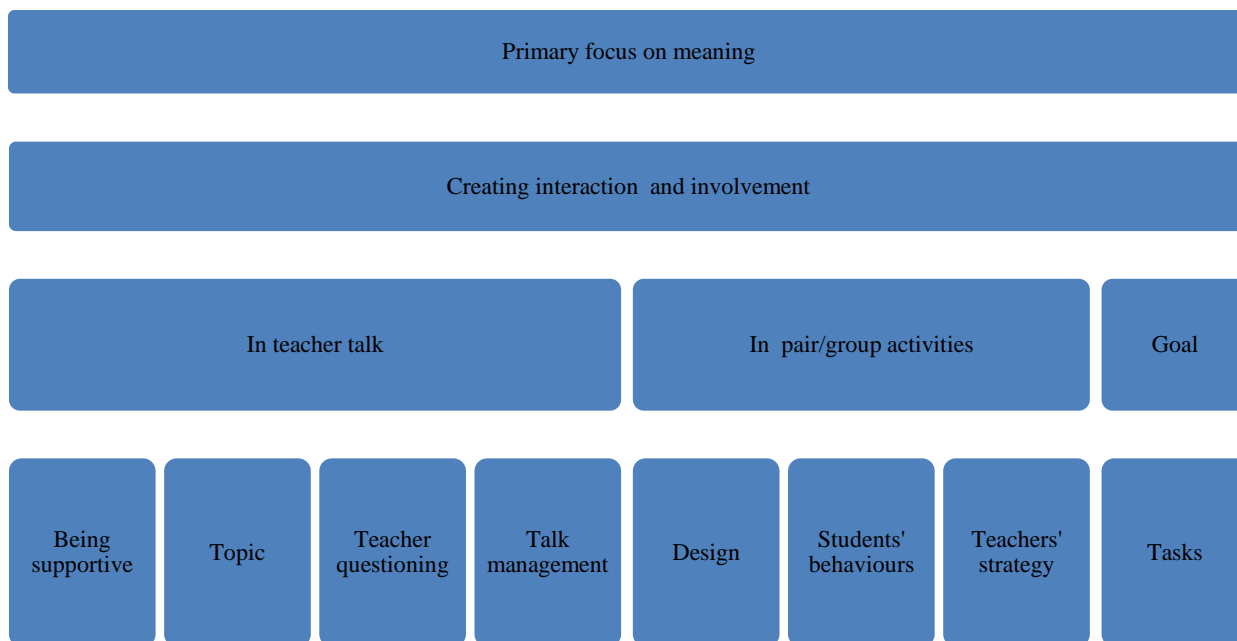


Figure 3. The observation framework.

For this research purpose, pedagogical activities are crudely categorised into teacher talk and pair/group activities. There are overlaps between the two. For example, some teacher talk appears in pair/group activities.

Procedure

Before the class began, a camera was set up at the back of the classroom. The lesson was recorded on video and field notes were taken throughout the observations. The researcher attempted to note objectively the teachers' verbal and non-verbal behaviours and students' reactions toward them. The researcher took a position of a non-participant observer, which means that the researcher was present on the scene, but only observed; she did not participate nor interact with insiders (Baker, 2006). This allows the researcher to have sufficient time and space to record data (Robson, 2002). After the observations, the researcher watched the videos repeatedly and filled in what she had missed to make the written record complete. The talk between the teachers and the students was later transcribed. Field notes were later added onto the transcription.

The first of the five cycles in this action research study commenced from the first workshop where the teachers were provided with knowledge about the CA, which included readings from research papers and books,

case studies, as well as practical examples showing the application of the CA to the textbook content. Then, classroom observations were held at the end of each month to allow time for their uptake. Observations were followed immediately by post-observation discussion and another workshop.

Data Analysis

Following the observation scheme, both posterior and priori coding were employed, as summarised in Figure 4.

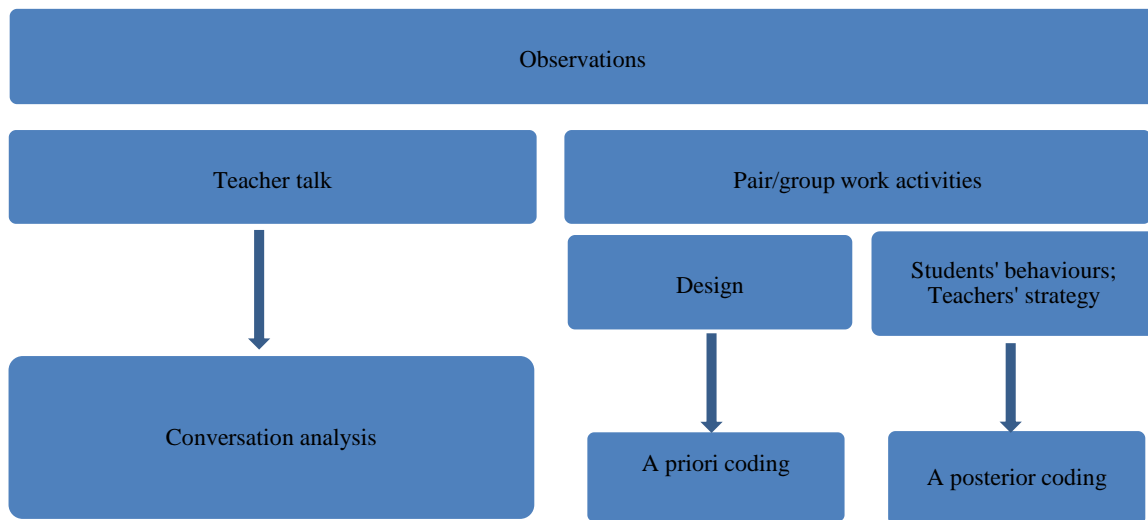


Figure 4. Data analysis framework for observation data.

With regard to teacher talk, the transcription and field notes were analysed using conversation analysis. This methodology used was for “naturally-occurring spoken interaction” (Seedhouse, 2005, p. 165). The data generated inductively from the analysis were allocated to the observation scheme which then became the coding scheme for evaluating the extent to which the teachers integrated the CA in their practice. The two key criteria became coding categories: (a) whether there is a primary FonM; and (b) the extent of interaction and involvement.

For pair/group activities, including tasks, Littlewood’s (2004) five-category continuum can be applied to evaluate the communicativeness (the first criterion) of the design. The design can be identified as a priori coding, non-communicative learning, i.e., Littlewood’s Box 1; pre-communicative language practice, Box 2; communicative language practice, Box 3; structured communication, Box 4; or authentic communication, Box 5. In terms of interaction, the design can be evaluated according to the extent to which it requires learners to interact with peers in the target language.

In the process of pair/group activities including tasks, the data from observation sheets were treated as qualitative data, following the principles of inductive analysis, i.e., codes and themes were developed from analysing the data, without coding beforehand by the researcher. Later, these analyzed data were subjected to quantitative treatment to discover, for example, the number of the teacher’s turns in relation to the number of students’ turns and the percentage of use of L1 and L2.

Analysis and Findings

Due to the limited space in this article, the researcher focuses on data from two teachers (Wendy and Ken).

Wendy

In the first observation, Wendy started the class with a warm-up activity provided by the textbook. The topic of this lesson was care of family members. Each group was asked to say a sentence about a picture (There were six pictures in total). The following is an extract from the classroom interaction.

Extract 1 (The italics show non-linguistic behaviours; the parentheses show the teacher's or the students' use of the L1, Chinese; and "XXX" indicates incomprehensible sounds):

1T: Everybody, turn to page 13. Let us read together. What did their families do for them? (Repeat after me), what did their families do for them?

2Ss: What did their families do for them?

3T: (Come on), one more time. What did their families do for them? (Repeat after me), what did their families do for them? What did their families do for them?

4Ss: What did their families do for them?

5T: Slow down, (louder), what did their families do for them?

6Ss: What did their families do for them?

7T: Look at the picture on this page. There are totally six pictures, right. (Group 1, tell me), what did you see in the pictures? Tell me. (Are you ready?) Group 1, tell me. In the first picture, what did you see? (Page 13, concentrate). Tell me (some Chinese). Group 1, anyone? What did their families do for them? So, in this picture, what did the mother do and what did the son do? Group 1, tell me. Give me a sentence.

8S: (XXX)

9T: Pardon?

10S: (Answer what they were doing?)

11T: Yes.

12S: They were cooking.

13T: They were cooking and the mother?

14S: They were cooking and the mother open the pot.

To start with, Wendy asked her students to repeat after her the title "What did their families do for them?" three times (Turn 1 to Turn 6). In Turn 7, the teacher started to draw their attention to meaning. In this turn, Wendy nominated a group, repeated the questions, and without any waiting time, she started to give them a hint, which drew the students' attention to the illustration, who the people are and what they are doing. In Turn 8, a student responded to her hint and seemed to say something about the action. From this turn to Turn 14, there was negotiation for meaning to some extent, and it appeared to be successful, as in Turn 14, the student contributed a sentence which responded to Wendy's last question in Turn 7.

Extract 2:

15T: Hay hay, everyone, mind the tense. (Look at the tense. We have just taught the past tense, so we need to use it, don't we?). Listen and look at the picture carefully. Who are in the picture? Who are in the picture? A mother? and a boy? and a son, right? So, what did the mother do for her son? The mother (*I sec.*), the mother (*I sec.*), *looked at Group 1*, (next group), Group 2, tell me.

16S: (Cannot tell from the picture.)

17T: (Cannot tell from the picture, really? It is easy! You are thinking in a very complex way), S1.

18S1: (XXX)

19T: Yes (*Kept nodding her head and smiling*). The mother cooked for her son. The mother cooked for her family (Is this picture not clear enough?). Next, Picture 2, Group 2.

The process of negotiation for meaning was discontinued by Wendy's explicit correction on form as seen in Turn 15. It is clear that from Turn 16 the flow was interrupted. Group 2 did not extend the talk from the

earlier turns. However, Wendy made an attempt to support (Turn 17) and this led to another student's turn (Turn 18). This was closely followed by a reformulation of the student's answer, which is a strategy of the discursal F-move (feedback in the sequence of teacher initiation (I), learner response (R), teacher feedback (F), i.e., IRF structure) (cf. Cullen, 2002). Nevertheless, Wendy immediately shifted the focus to the next topic.

Extract 3:

19T: (Go on), Picture 2. (Can you tell from the picture?) A father and a daughter. (That phrase, what phrase? You don't know?). *Saw a student putting up her hand, S2?*

20S2: XXX

21T: Take the medicine. But is it true? (Keep it simple), easy, (you are thinking in a very complex way).

22S: XXX

23T: OK, good. (It is a good answer. That will do). The father told the daughter to take some medicine. Ok, good. (But, the main thing is ... remember this phrase?) Take care of. *Wrote it on the board.* Everybody, take care of.

24Ss: Take care of.

Then, Wendy kept on guiding her students to finish this "look and say" activity according to the standard answers provided by the textbook until finishing the last picture. From the above conversation analysis, Wendy's TTT reveals four salient features which can be evaluated according to the two criteria of the observation scheme: primary FonM and learner participation. Firstly, in the warm-up activity, there are pictures served as a meaningful context to talk with the topic related to self and family, and however, if the teacher could allow the learners to talk more freely, this would become a more meaning-focused activity. In practice, the teacher frequently either asked the students to repeat after her (as in Turns 1-6; 23-24) or reminded them of formal features (Turn 15). Occasionally, there are examples of co-constructed meaning, as Turns 8-14 show. Her intention was to let the students say a sentence about the picture, and she seemed to regard asking students to open up as employing the CA.

In regard to the second criterion, the second feature is limited waiting time and frequent filling in the gaps, as shown in Turns 7, 15, and 19, which are pointed out by Walsh (2002) to be discouraging learning potential. Learners may have the opportunities to negotiate for meaning and use clarification or confirmation checks, or they simply need more time to understand the question and think. Therefore, extended waiting time is suggested. The third feature is that she tended to accept only the standard answers and seldom built on learners' contribution for inviting further their turns. In Turns 20-21, Wendy somewhat denied the student's answer "take the medicine", but in Turns 22-23, she appreciated another student's answer, "The father told the daughter to take some medicine". However, she immediately guided her students to another phrase, "take care of", which is the standard answer by the textbook. She wrote it, rather than the students' contribution, on the board. Teachers need to allow any and all students' contributions not judged as right or wrong answers to promote a communicative classroom (Johnson, 1995).

The fourth feature is related to error correction; the way Wendy corrected her students caused the flow of the students' turns interrupted. As seen in Turn 14, when a student said some words, Wendy reminded the whole class to pay attention to the tense. This interrupted the flow of the students' turns. Since the student did not have the chance to reproduce it, there is no way to know whether there was student uptake on the usage. In addition, from a quantitative aspect, the analysis identifies a low extent of learner involvement. Among these 24 turns, the students account for 12 turns: four turns are repeating after their teacher (Turns 2, 4, 6, and 24) and three turns involve L1 only. That leaves only five turns involving the use of L2, such as in Turns 12 and 14.

There are clearly positive effects of the peer observation on this teacher development program. Inspired by Ken, Wendy made a radical change in terms of her F-move. She has become encouraging and accepting different answers from her students since the second observation. In the following observation, she asked the students to look at the pictures on their worksheet and discuss with peers to finish the open-ended sentences. While Wendy walking around groups, she encouraged the students frequently to think of as many different answers as possible. When checking answers, Wendy asked the students to read out their answers. Different from the previous two observations, although receiving an answer, Wendy kept asking whether the rest of class had different answers. The utterances for encouraging students include "There is no standard answer"; "Come on"; "Tell me other answers"; and "What else?" (Wendy, Observation 2).

This attitude also affected Wendy's ways to correct students' errors; she used more prompts with elicitation and clarification techniques, short and quick without interrupting the flow (e.g., eat medicine, are you sure?) (Lyster & Mori, 2006). She is more patient when she attempts to elicit a more proper answer. For example, when a student simply answered "She often drinks water" for keeping healthy, Wendy asked her further, "Is that a good way?", and later, led the students to consider the amount of intake (Wendy, Observation 3).

Ken

One of the activities Ken did in the first observation was "designing dialogues" (see Table 2), the content of which was adapted from the dialogue in the textbook. His instruction was "One of your classmates did not come to school yesterday. Discuss with your group the possible reasons, choose a name for the student, and design a conversation between you and him/her". The teacher gave very clear instructions about the context and how to do it with this activity. He also guided the students closely on how to complete each A's and B's turn by comparing it with the textbook. Table 2 shows this activity on their worksheet.

Applying the framework to evaluate whether there is a primary FonM is demonstrated below. In the design of this group work, Ken prepared the context for the dialogues based on a common real-life situation, and the students were required to communicate for co-constructing meaning. The design allows the students to use their imagination or creativity to think of the situations, such as why the student did not go to school yesterday and what happened. The structure in design becomes opener in later turns (Turns 7-10), which provides the students with more freedom to co-construct meaning. Some meanings of the utterance are given (from Turns 1-6), and thus constrain learners' choice of language. A task should allow learners to choose any language they view appropriate to complete it. In terms of Littlewood's (2004) framework, it should be situated in Box 4, structured communication, where the teacher structures the situation to ensure that the learners can deal with it with their existing language resources.

In the process, Ken guided the students closely on how to complete every turn of Role A and Role B during the activity. This made the activity very structured, and thus counteracted the communicativeness of the activity. On the other hand, some of the students seemed very interested and asked Ken in Chinese how to say something in English. They asked a variety of vocabulary or phrases. Ken drew all students' attention and then taught the answers to the whole class. Ken's response to all the students' questions is believed to have potentials to maximize learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Students' questions may reflect the current stage of their developing interlanguage, and what they notice is usually available to learn, and it may also be noticed by their peers.

Table 2

An Example of the "Designing Dialogues" Activity

1A: _____, you didn't come to school yesterday, why?
2B: I didn't come because _____.
3A: What was wrong?
4B: I _____ and _____.
5A: I'm sorry about that. Did you see a doctor?
6B: _____.
7A: _____.
8B: _____.
9A: _____.
10B: _____.

The second criterion involves interaction and involvement. In its design, this is a discussion activity, and the students were required to engage in interaction. In its process, as recorded in the Observation-Behavior and Strategy Sheet (see Table 1), the general picture is that the students were not clear about how discussion work should be, some wrote individually and seemed not to have the habit to communicate in L2. However, frequently, some groups were observed sharing and exchanging opinions with peers in the 10-minute activity, with mixed L1 and L2.

In terms of the goal, the learners were required to discuss and construct a coherent conversation. This is congruent with the definition of a goal in this paper, that is, a goal for learners to achieve and must be achieved cooperatively with peers so as to arise the negotiated interaction. Finally, when the students were invited to present their work, two groups (out of five) immediately showed their eagerness to present.

Table 3 summarizes the analyzed results.

Table 3

Evaluation of Ken's Activity

Criteria	In design	In process/outcome
Primary FonM	Meaning focused; Some constraints on learner's language choice	The teacher's close guidance to complete the turns made it more structured
Interaction and involvement	Students required to interact	Some engagement, little use of L2
Goal	To construct a conversation	Some groups completed

The findings reveal that Ken possesses the characteristics which contribute to the implementation of the CA, such as openness to different answers, which is a crucial step to maximize learning opportunities. However, Ken neglected the importance of interaction in L2 in the process and over protected his students with very structured discussion, as seen in this activity. In relation to increasing students' engagement, it was suggested to Ken that he assign scores for good behaviors to keep classroom order and to encourage and engage students in group activities. However, it takes time for teachers to develop such practical knowledge of knowing when and how to assign scores. In the second observation, Ken attempted "messenger dictation", a group activity (Woodard, 2003). Ken scrambled 10 segments from a text which were adapted from a dialogue in the textbook and placed them on the walls. The goal was for students to unscramble those. The author's observation was that the messengers were doing their job responsibly and running back and forth to report to their group. They developed promptly their own strategies for carrying out the task; some kept repeating the sentence to themselves while walking back to their group; some spelling the words to their partner who took notes. The results were that two groups got all the sequences right, one group did not finish, and two groups got it

slightly wrong. This activity constitutes a task due to the fact that it meets all three criteria to a great extent for both design and process.

Although Ken successfully employed a task, this does not suggest definitely that he has developed the strategies to increase learners' engagement. It is the activity itself which has the potential to "push" students to interact in L2. After learning from Wendy, Ken's skills of assigning scores improved greatly in the last observation.

As regards allowing freedom for learners, this is more related to teachers' beliefs about the learners. Ken acted in accordance with what Williams and Burden (1997) termed the "receptacles" metaphor. Learners are viewed as vessels to be filled with knowledge, rather than as individual explorers. Eventually, with the increase of the teacher's willingness to attempt the CA, they have become more understanding of their students' abilities. They have realized that their students are more capable than they previously thought.

It is important to note that though this framework was applied to analyze the teachers' practice, there is no value judgement suggested. Both FonFs activities or FonM activities have their pedagogical functions. Furthermore, according to the sociocultural theory perspective on conversation analysis, any attempts to understand the L2 classroom discourse should recognize the important relationship between language use and pedagogic purpose, as Seedhouse (2005) and Walsh (2002) suggested. In other words, teachers' pedagogic purpose should be considered when interpreting their classroom discourse.

Discussion

Common Features

The aim of this observation framework was to evaluate the extent to which the teachers' practitioner knowledge in adapting the CA develops over five months. The analysis leads to an in-depth examination of the teachers' practice, as well as leads to a better understanding of their underlying beliefs. It also helps to pinpoint where improvement needs to be made.

The observation scheme provides a clear picture of Wendy's teacher talk. ~~Mostly~~ In general, in this observation and in the preliminary one, Wendy's class exhibited an extremely uneven power relationship. In the TTT, there were scarcely any cases of co-constructed meaning between her and her students. That the teacher rarely built on students' responses to develop further student participation confirms the findings of Fröhlich, Spada, and Allen's (1985) study nearly 30 years ago. The teacher talked and asked questions most of the time. She not only chose what to talk about, but also restricted what was to be answered. She controlled every detail in order to process the class smoothly and to suit her quick tempo in an obviously dominant mode. These features overlap to a great extent with Walsh's (2002) list of the prevailing features in EFL classrooms. It is hardly controversial to point out that such features reduce students' learning opportunities to use the target language.

These two examples cover different pedagogical activities; however, some common attributes can be found. In Ken's first activity, the feature that the teacher often control both content and procedure is also apparent. Another feature relate to the tendency to neglect learners' interaction. Two-way communication generates not only more comprehensible input (Long, 1983), but also more comprehensible output (Swain, 1995) through negotiation, feedback, and clarification from the participants. The process of producing output triggers noticing and noticing a problem by external feedback (e.g., clarification requests) or internal feedback pushes learners to modify their output. These cognitive processes are involved in L2 learning. Interaction is

also essential from the sociocultural theory perspective. It is viewed as a mediated process, which is fundamental for learning (Lantolf, 2000). In spite of its importance, it is replaced by teacher-dominated modes and teacher-centered instruction, and rarely happens in EFL classrooms, according to past studies cited in Richards (2008).

Capturing Insights

This framework seems to have the potential to capture the features of the teachers' pedagogical activities in this research context. There was no teacher development observed in terms of increasing the extent of FonM instruction, that is, from the left to the right of Littlewood's continuum. Rather, their knowledge growth was observed in terms of the quality of teacher talk and improved skills in managing group work, for example. These themes would not have emerged if the classroom discourse had not been viewed as dynamic and an inductive approach was not taken. In other words, teachers' knowledge growth cannot be evaluated quantitatively. Fröhlich et al.'s (1985) Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme (COLT) relies heavily on a priori coding, which does not allow codes or themes from the data. Ken used a Box 4 and a Box 5 activity in the first two observations, but this did not suggest that his knowledge of the CA was well developed. Copying or revising a model task in designing a task does not mean that the teacher can operationalize the task well. The inductive coding plan can identify the skills needed to promote co-constructed meanings and students' involvement.

This article only provides one example of Wendy's teacher talk and two of Ken's group work activities. However, the emerging data from these five-month observations reveal that the teachers' knowledge in the CA is developed in terms of knowledge about the teacher's role, language teaching, learners, contextual factors, and curriculum.

Application to Teacher Education Program

The application of this framework is twofold; it can also be used in coaching teachers in the use of the CA by providing a framework for planning and reviewing their own practice of CLT, apart from evaluating their practice. This framework has fewer items, compared with Mangubhai et al.'s (2007) list of CLT attributes, which identifies as many as 62 criterial attributes. Their list may be more useful as materials for teachers to understand the CA rather than as a set of criteria to evaluate their practice. This observation scheme was introduced to the teacher participants in the first workshop for overview. The teacher educator can let the teachers brainstorm what teachers can do in TTT for encouraging their students' contributions or ways to increase learners' use of L2 in discussion, for example. Then, they compare their ideas with the relevant literature, e.g., this detailed list.

Credibility and Transferability

Validity/credibility was also considered in employing this framework. One main criticism against observational research lies in the area of validity. Observers rely more exclusively on their own perceptions and, thus, are more vulnerable to bias from their subjective interpretation of situations (P. A. Alder & P. Alder, 1998). However, this can be compensated by using subjects' quotes to enrich and confirm the researcher's analysis (Creswell, 2008), as is the case in this study. This study employed interviews with both the teachers and students. In addition, P. A. Alder and P. Alder (1998) also suggested that multiple observers can enhance the validity of observations, as they can cross check each other's interpretation. Co-observers were employed in this study as an aid for professional growth, as well as for increasing the validity. However, a problem which

arose from the observation was that the students' voices were often incomprehensible to the observer, especially when they sat facing the front. The researcher remained at the back of the classroom for holding the position of not intervening in the class. Also because of this stance, the teacher, as a co-observer, was not requested to approach the learners for a clear observation. A suggestion may be to equip more cameras on the walls from different angles.

The analyzed interactional data followed the principles of conversation analysis, which can ensure the construct validity of the quantitative treatment of interactional features (e.g., error correction) (Seedhouse, 2005). In addition, internal reliability can be increased by having another/multiple coders to compare the categories (Nunan, 1992).

In terms of transferability, most of the few CLT observation frameworks evaluate either teacher talk or pair/group work activities, or take limited views. For example, COLT suggested that whole class activities were less communicative than group work. However, numerous studies have explored how teacher talk can facilitate learners' involvement in interaction (e.g., Walsh, 2002; Cullen, 2002). It neglects the situation when group work may be restricted to some teaching contexts, and the teachers can develop their own ways of creating communicativeness in teacher talk. Sullivan (2000) provided such an example. The framework in this study can be applied to both and, is therefore believed to be capable of being applied to other cultural contexts.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to help the teachers' practitioner knowledge growth in adapting the CA. To this end, it is necessary to use a systematic observation scheme to evaluate how their knowledge develops over time. The results provide preliminary evidence that the scheme was capable of analyzing the communicativeness of the teachers' pedagogical activities; it also identified the pedagogical features which need to be modified, and explored their beliefs underlying their practice. Only understanding these insights can help them plan for the next action for improvement in the cyclical processes of reflective action research, and finally develop their practitioner knowledge in the CA.

The results may indicate that this observation scheme has the potential to capture insights into teachers' practice and beliefs. These insights were discovered due to the fact that the framework views classroom discourse as dynamic and takes an inductive approach. Therefore, the framework allows codes emerging from what actually happens in the classroom, which may help understand problems and solve them. It can be applied to observing both teacher talk and pair/group work activities. It covers two dimensions: design and process. It is flexible; it can be adjusted according to specific teaching contexts and can be applied to a variety of other settings.

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