

**Contrasting classroom spoken discourse with casual conversation
using Hymes's (1979) ethnomethodological framework.**

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1 Introduction

The seven features of discourse proposed by Hymes' 'Ethnography of speaking' (1972, reviewed in Coulthard, 1985: 44-55 and Brazil, 1995: 101-109) provide a framework which not only sets out his view of communicative competence, but also facilitates the examination of oral discourse from various genres.

The features are setting, purpose, participants, key, channels, message content and message form. Taking each in turn (sections 2.1-2.7) this paper briefly explains them and uses each to summarise the distinguishing characteristics of a classroom presentation activity and a casual conversation. It also examines some implications for pedagogic practice and learners' conversational proficiency arising from those distinctions and suggests some solutions to overcome some of classroom discourse's shortcoming. Finally, section 3 shows which discourse type best highlights these features and why.

By necessity, two distinct samples were used. The classroom discourse data come from a presentation activity performed during the first lesson of an advanced English conversation course to twelve second grade Japanese female undergraduates. It used a video of the author's British family in casual conversation to highlight the course's various topics of study. The recorded casual conversation itself provided the data for that genre. By 'a casual conversation', the author follows Nunan's view of 'genuine communication' whereby:

.....decisions about who says what to whom and when are [negotiable].

(Nunan, 1987: 137)

2 Some distinguishing features of the two genres and their pedagogic implications.

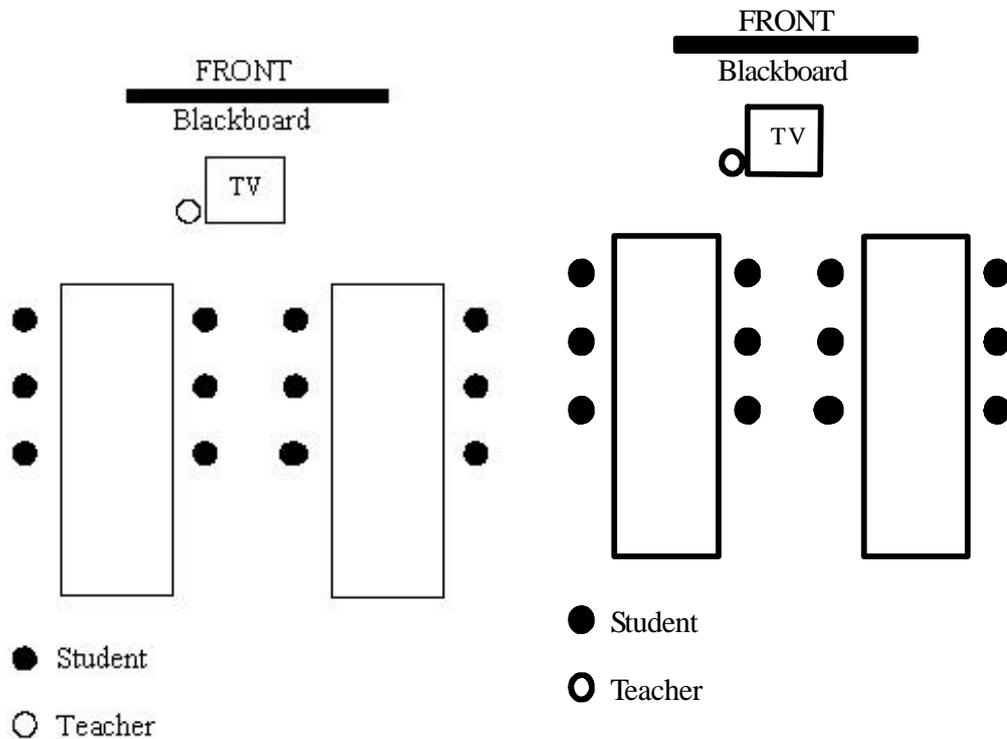
2.1 Setting.

This alludes to the place, time (Coulthard 1985: 44), social or physical context (Cook, 1989: 25) and psychological environment (Hymes, noted by Coulthard, 1985: 44-45) in which discourse occurs.

The presentation activity occurred at a predetermined time and place, for a restricted group of participants. They attended for a mutually agreed time period (1^{1/2} hours) and purpose (the study and practice of English conversation), knowing and accepting that the teacher would dictate the lesson's agenda and format. Thus participants held a distinctive set of preconceived, culturally and experientially reinforced perceptions regarding their speaking rights and roles within this setting which strongly influenced speech behaviour (see sections 2.3 and 2.7 for examples).

The seating arrangement (figure 1) was deliberately designed to facilitate viewing of the video whilst also maximising opportunities for teacher-student, pair, small and large group interaction.

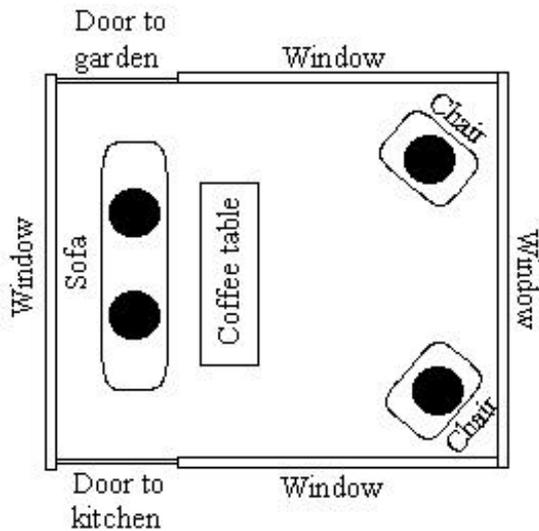
Figure 1 - Seating arrangement during the presentation activity.



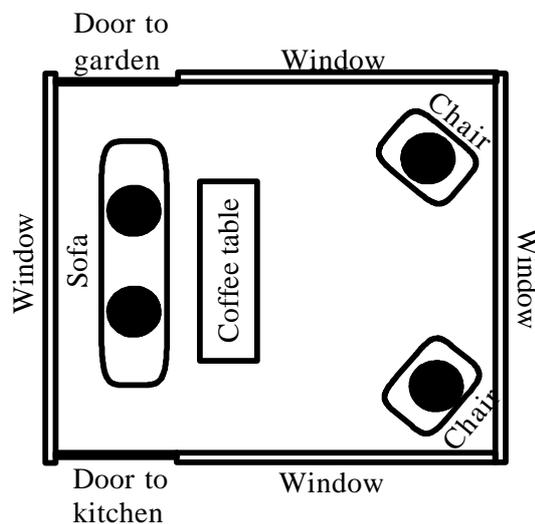
The impact which seating arrangement has on classroom interaction (Brazil, 1995: 101-102; Brown, 1994a: 412; Gower and Walters, 1983: 31) required decisions regarding furniture layout to be much more considered than was necessary for the casual conversation.

In contrast, the impromptu casual conversation occurred not only in a family's sun-lounge but also between rooms and had no predetermined duration. Further, pairs often traded their original seats upon returning from the garden or kitchen (figure 2), whereas on the few occasions when students left their seats during the presentation they always returned to their self-assigned places.

Figure 2 - Seating arrangement during the casual conversation.



● Interlocutor



● Interlocutor

Some view classroom and spoken discourse as two irreconcilably different types of discourse simply because of the effect the classroom setting has on learners (Seedhouse, 1996: 18; Cullen, 1998). Longyear is more forthright:

Then why are we here in a classroom? Why am I standing in front of a blackboard with chalk in my hand, trying to teach you English? A classroom is about the *worst* possible place to learn English. If you are going to learn English here, you need to forget that this is a classroom. You must forget about being students. You must forget about my being a teacher. You just need to speak English.

(Longyear, D. 2000)

This is however rather simplistic and perhaps naive. Richards and Lockhart (1994: 108) recognise that participants' assumptions and expectations of the classroom setting and their roles within it arise from their cultural upbringing, strongly reinforced by long experience and that these are not so easily discarded. Widdowson concurs:

One cannot expect that learners will very readily adopt a pattern of behaviour in the English class which is at variance with the roles they are required to play in their other lessons.

(Widdowson, 1984, cited by Willis, 2000: 8)

In other words, it is unreasonable to expect students to become 'unJapanese' simply because they enter an English language classroom setting.

Is it this setting or 'the lesson' as an event which is counter-productive to acquiring conversational proficiency, or is it the participants' preconceptions of these which really intervenes? Perhaps using settings more commonly associated with casual conversation, (the university lawn or the cafeteria), where smaller groups could use a larger space for greater 'freedom', might start to break down some of the preconceptions which often negate even the best efforts in the classroom.

2.2 Purpose.

'Purpose' denotes the function which discourse serves, either at the speech event (situation) level or at the level of individual speech acts, (an 'exchange', Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975, reviewed by Brazil, 1995: *passim*. or "a single interactional function" Saville-Troike, 1996: 371).

At event level, the purposes of the presentation activity and the conversation were clearly different. The former's function was to impart information deemed relevant and necessary by the teacher, i.e. it was chiefly pedagogical (Brazil, 1995: 105). However, the conversation's function was generally phatic, i.e. social "bridge building" (Brazil, *ibid.*) or "just chatting" (Stubbs, 1983: 101). This is a commonly held distinction (Stubbs, *ibid.*: 146; Coulthard, 1985: 47; Brazil, *ibid.*, 1992: 6). As Cook (1989: 51) notes of the genre in general, conversation "[was] not primarily necessitated by a practical task", as was the presentation activity.

Individual speech acts during the presentation also served distinctive functions: directing and informing (transcripts 1a and 1b), eliciting (transcripts 2a, 2b and 9) content delineation (boundary exchanges, transcript 3) and evaluation (transcript 2a's 'Yeah, that's right', 'OK' and 'Good').

Transcript 1 - Directing and informing.

(a).

Teacher: [After passing out the syllabus handouts]

OK, let's look at the handout. (Directing).

Students: (NV. Look at the syllabus sheet).

Teacher: This is the syllabus for this semester.....*gakki*.....semester. (Informing).

(b).

Teacher: Yuka, can you turn the air conditioner on ? (Directing).

It's still a bit warm in here. (Informing).

Transcript 2 - Eliciting.

(a). Display and closed questions.

Teacher: [Explaining the penultimate topic on the course.]

Next, there's sociolinguistics. What does sociolinguistics mean in Japanese ?

[Students pick up their dictionaries and check]

Hiroko: *Shyakaigengogakku*.

Teacher: Yeah, that's right. Can someone explain what the word means ? It's a bit difficult.

[Long pause] Maybe it's a new word for you. It means the social and cultural rules of language. For example, who teaches you 'Listening' ?

Rieko: Shimizu *sensei*.

Teacher: OK. Shimizu *sensei*. How do you call her ? What name do you use ? Chigusa ?

Chigusa: Shimizu *sensei*.

Teacher: Do you call her Ritzuko ?

Chigusa: No.

Teacher: Why ?

Chigusa: [Pauses to formulate her answer in English].

She is a teacher. I'm a student. She is higher. [Hesitant key]

Teacher: Good. You call her 'Shimizu *sensei*' because it's a social and cultural rule of Japanese

language. You must be polite to someone above you. That's a sociolinguistic.....

shyakaigengogakku no.....sociolinguistic rule for Japanese. So culture and

society

changes how you say things. [Jokingly] So, why does everyone call me Paul

?

Such display and closed questions characteristically form a large part of 'teacher talk' in general (Lynch, 1991: 202; Brazil, 1995: 19; Thornbury, 1996: 281; Seedhouse, 1996: 19-20; Wardhaugh, 1998: 302), though were not used exclusively:

(b). Referential and divergent questions.

Teacher: [Having explained the syllabus handout and each week's study topic].
Which one is most interesting for you ? [Pause] Which topic do you think is most interesting ? Rieko ?

Rieko: [Confers furtively with her friend to check the question's meaning in Japanese. Pauses
to think] Maybe I like non-verbal communication.

Teacher: OK. Yeah, that'll be fun. [Friendly key.]

Another peculiarity of the activity (and of classroom discourse generally) is the teacher's overt evaluation of students' responses.

Transcript 3 - Content delineation.

Teacher: OK, (Frame).
so that's this month's lessons. (Focus).
Then (Frame).
there's October's topics. (Focus).

Brazil explains clearly why content delineation is a function indicative of classroom discourse:

To use a boundary exchange is to act as if you are in charge of the event. Only participants like teachers, who are recognised as being in control of the development of the discourse, are normally expected to mark out its structure in this way.
(Brazil, 1995: 28)

Though not a distinguishing feature of the activity, the conversation used phatic function in matching exchanges (transcript 4) and in showing concern and consideration for others (Lisa's concern over the price in transcript 5 and her interrogatives and Shaun's offer to make tea in transcript 10). Also, the function of completing other's moves occurred, though to a lesser extent (transcript 4). The

activity transcripts here and Brazil's (1995: 34-35) classroom data show that this is not a distinguishing feature of that discourse type.

Transcript 4 - Phatic function and completing other's moves.

Lisa: Show us the photos of Hinako then. Are they |
Author: | They're in the kitchen. I'll
go get 'em.
[Collects the photographs of his young daughter from the kitchen and gives
them to Lisa].
Lisa: [Flicking through the pictures]. Oh she's adorable. |
Author: Yeah, she's lovely. | [A matching
exchange]

Implying was another function predominantly exhibited in the conversation (transcript 5), perhaps indicating that classroom discourse necessitates speech which is more 'to the point' or safe to accept at face value.

Transcript 5 - Phatic function and implying.

[The family is talking about giving the author's old computer to Lisa's children.]
Author: Well, I don't use it much do I, now that I'm in Japan,
Lisa: Mmm.
Author: and mum can't use it to type letters because the printer doesn't work.
Lisa: No.
Author: Terry and Louis'll probably get a lot more use out of it. They could use it for their
homework or games. You could even use it to send me e-mails,
Lisa: Oh yeah
[thoughtful look]
Author: but I'd have to get it upgraded for that. I don't think the processor's fast enough and it
hasn't got a modem.
Lisa: I'd like them to have a computer for school, but they'd need a printer to go with it. (Implying).
Author: Well, if I buy that as well it can be an early Christmas present.
Lisa: Would that be all right ? It'll be too expensive, won't it ? (Phatic concern).

Author: Nah. If Nobuko an' I pay for it between us it'll be OK.

Finally, back-channelling utterances by the listener, which provide feedback to the speaker on how his/her turn is being received (Montgomery, 1995: 114) differed between contexts. Counter to their back-channel behaviour during conversation (Smith, 1987: 85; Hattori, 1987, cited by Takahashi, 1989: 250; Hayashi, 1988, cited by Tannen, 1994: 69), the Japanese students limited theirs during the presentation to only non-verbal cues, while the family used both verbal and non-verbal more extensively (transcripts 5 and 6).

Transcript 6 - Back-channelling behaviour.

[The family are talking about a recent trip the author, his mother and Lisa's son Terry,

made to Tokyo Disneyland.]

Lisa: He said he loved it.

Mother: Oh yeah, he hasn't stopped talking about it since he got back.

Lisa: No.

Mother: Shaun told me he's driving his teachers at school crazy with it.

Lisa: Oh yeah.

Author: We went on the Star Wars ride three times. Even mum went on once.

Lisa: I know

[Disbelieving key]

Mother: Well why not, I'm not too old yet you know.

As Brazil (1995: 109) and Wardhaugh point out, the functions which most of the teacher's speech acts served are inappropriate for social speech because people "would feel that they were being manipulated" (Wardhaugh, 1998: 302). So, what implications does this disparity have for students' conversational proficiency? The author shares Stubbs' (1983: 146) and Brazil's concern that the types of speech acts which dominate classroom discourse have very low transferability to social speech:

It is interesting to note that, in so far as teachers are [eliciting and overtly evaluating], they are subjecting their students to massive exposure to [exchange types] that they are unlikely to use in other kinds of speech event.

(Brazil, 1995: 105)

Though McCarthy (1991: 20-21) demonstrates that such (transactional) classroom discourse exchanges are not entirely absent from (interactional) casual conversation, he concedes that the latter contains many other functions (e.g. completing other's

moves and phatic communion) that are not generally present in the former.

Another problem is that the prevalence of display and closed questions in this presentation surely does little to enhance learners' ability to formulate meaningful, extended responses to the referential and open questions prevalent in conversation (Nunan, 1989: 30). Also, the omission of indirect speech acts inhibits student's ability to correctly interpret questions as requests or commands during conversation (Tannen, 1994: 189). Though Seedhouse (1996: 23) views these differences as a necessary consequence of having a discourse type which is specifically tailored to the institutional setting, it remains a concern if the pedagogic goal is to improve learners' conversational proficiency.

2.3 Participants.

Hymes considers that discourse analysis must account for the participants because they bring with them certain social and cultural assumptions and expectations which affect, among other things, their perceived role(s), role relationships with other participants and responsibilities within that discourse.

Few differences between the presentation and the conversation were as stark as that of the differing roles which the participants took. That a teacher is dominant within the classroom is a well documented phenomenon (Van Lier, 1984: 163; Nunan, 1987: 141; 1993: 116; Brazil, 1995: 103-104; Wardhaugh: 303), i.e. he takes a "controlling role" (Brazil, 1995: 103). This asymmetrical role relationship is necessary to fulfil the differential responsibilities inherent within the teacher's and students' positions (Brazil, 1995: 104; Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 98). Richards and Nunan note that:

The teacher-learner role relationship lies at the very heart of the classroom process. Learning a language is a social activity above all, and in a classroom setting, it is subject to a unique set of social conventions.

(Richards and Nunan, 1990: 83)

If these conventions were not applied, progressing the lesson would be difficult, but students understand, accept and even expect their subordinate position because of their preconceptions regarding their and the teacher's roles within the lesson. Richards and Lockhart write:

Teaching is an activity which is embedded within a set of culturally bound assumptions

about teachers, teaching, and learners. These assumptions reflect what the teacher's

responsibility is believed to be, how learning is understood, and how students are expected to interact in the classroom. In some cultures, teaching is viewed as a teacher-controlled and directed process.

(Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 107)

They probably also intuitively understand that complex tasks such as teaching and learning require someone to be in overall charge.

This asymmetrical relationship affects the teacher's and learners' discourse behaviour, particularly with respect to turn-taking, degree of politeness (section 2.7), comparative turn length and negotiation of meaning. Van Lier (1984: 168), Ellis (1992: 38, cited by Seedhouse, 1996: 17) and Fairclough show why the turn-taking behaviours evident in the presentation and conversation are dissimilar:

[In classroom discourse] we do not find shared rules for turn-taking where participants have equal rights and obligations, but an asymmetrical distribution of rights (e.g. to self-select, to interrupt, to 'hold the floor' across several turns) and obligations (e.g. to take a turn if nominated to do so).

(Fairclough, 1992: 19)

For example, in transcript 8 Keiko had to raise her hand to get the teacher's permission to speak before she could ask to use the washroom. No such permission, either to speak or use the bathroom is sought during casual conversation. This supports both McCarthy's (1991: 128) observation that students rarely speak out of turn (and thus perhaps explains their preferred reliance on the non-verbal back-channel) and Fairclough's (*ibid.*) point that teachers have power which is neglected in conversation. Of turn-taking in social speech, Stubbs writes:

Rules for initiation will be different, since everyone will be expected to chip in, and this will clearly affect discourse sequencing.

(Stubbs, 1983: 101)

Further, the data presented here shows that learners have fewer and generally shorter turns than the teacher, while no party in the conversation dominated the discourse, i.e. 'natural' conversation is more symmetrical. Finally, despite encouraging

a more informal atmosphere, the teacher's controlling role provided fewer opportunities for negotiation of meaning than did the casual conversation.

If learners' perceptions of what a lesson (even an English conversation lesson) should be, who can say and do what, and how and when they can say and do it, differs so markedly from the way casual conversation among native speakers actually proceeds, what are the implications for their proficiency in spontaneous social discourse ? Brazil (1995: 110) and Dornyei and Thurrell highlight the importance of exposing students to second language (L2) turn-taking conventions:

The language classroom does not offer too many opportunities for students to develop their awareness of turn-taking rules or to practice turn-taking skills. This is unfortunate,

since for many students - especially those from cultures whose turn-taking conventions

are very different from those in the target language - turn-taking ability does not come automatically.

(Dornyei and Thurrell, 1994: 42)

Though turn-taking rules are acquired early in life (Nunan, 1993: 102; Cook, 1989: 59-60), these rules are culture bound (Wardhaugh, 1986: 295; Chaudron, 1988: 105; Cook, 1989: 52-53; Thorp, 1991; McCarthy, 1991: 128-129; Stern, 1992: 158; Brown, 1994b: 237, citing Allwright, 1980; Edwards *et al.*, 1998: 111) and, as noted above, students with conflicting conventions may have difficulties conforming. However, providing opportunities for students to acquire the L2's speaking conventions is an additional challenge to teachers which Cook (1989: 117-118) shows is practicable.

2.4 Key.

'Key' refers to "'the tone, manner or spirit' in which (a speech) act or event is performed" (Coulthard, 1985: 48, present author's brackets). Though vague, it equates roughly to 'attitude' (Nunan, 1991: 103) so is difficult to represent in written transcripts, though it can be exemplified.

During the presentation activity the author's discourse was characterised by a relatively limited range of keys, intended to set a controlled but informal, relaxed and non- intimidating atmosphere. Those used included praising, friendly and disciplinary keys (transcripts 2a, 2b and 7 respectively) and referring tone "that evokes 'togetherness' or a shared perspective." (Brazil, 1995: 108). Students utilised an even more limited range of keys: hesitant, when using English (transcript 2a), secretive,

when checking understanding with friends in Japanese (transcript 2b) and polite (throughout).

However, native speakers during the casual conversation used a different set of keys including affectionate, disbelieving and highly informal (transcripts 4, 6 and 12 respectively).

Though participants in both pieces of discourse reinforced their verbal keys with corresponding non-verbal communication (in line with Coulthard, *ibid.* and Soudek and Soudek, 1985), interestingly, the keys associated with each discourse activity would generally seem incongruous if employed in the other. Affectionate and disbelieving keys are inappropriate in the classroom, while disciplinary and praising keys would be poorly received in social speech among perceived equals. There seems to be little overlap between the two key sets, joking and friendly keys being notable exceptions (transcripts 2a, 12 and 2b, 10 respectively). This phenomenon can be accounted for by the differences in settings, participants' perceived roles and status and the discourses' purposes.

Both Nunan (1991: 103) and Brown note the importance of key in conveying an utterance's function beyond its purely propositional meaning:

Intonation patterns are very significant.....not just for interpreting such straightforward

elements as questions and statements and emphasis but more subtle messages like sarcasm, endearment, insult, solicitation, praise, etc.

(Brown, 1994a: 240)

The implication is that by not exposing learners to keys during classroom discourse which they are likely to encounter during casual conversation with native speakers, teachers (even native speakers teaching conversation) are perhaps holding back their students' acquisition of important conversational skills. Learners may often have greater difficulty in identifying the speaker's true intention or using suitable keys appropriately themselves. Such deficiencies are already evident even among more advanced Japanese speakers of English (Cook, 1989: 50-51; White, 1993; Clennell, 1997: 119-120; Nakatsu, 2000, Willis, 2000: 9).

Finally, regarding the teachability of key perhaps Thompson's viewpoint is pertinent:

We are faced with the task of devising teaching models which balance simplicity and teachability with accuracy and generalizability.

(Thompson, 1995: 242)

though how this can be achieved is unclear.

2.5 Channels.

'Channel' means the medium of transmission through which discourse occurs, for example oral, telegraphic, written and semaphore (Coulthard, 1985: 49), video (MacWilliam, 1986), the internet (Gitsaki and Taylor, 2000), music (Domoney and Harris, 1993) or films (Berthiaume, 2000).

It was a distinctive feature of the presentation that it could supplement verbal and non-verbal communication channels with video footage, a blackboard and a syllabus handout. When accompanied by verbal explanations these media provided 2-channel input (aural and visual) to varying degrees of sophistication. Lessons as predetermined blocks of time set aside for instruction permit the prior planning and preparation that use of such media requires.

Conversely, being spontaneous and unprepared in nature, the casual conversation did not facilitate such advanced preparation. Indeed the familiar complaint that "radio, television or videos have destroyed the art of conversation" points to their unsuitability as channels for social discourse. When such media are used in this genre as channels (e.g. wedding videos or holiday photographs), discourse is often temporarily suspended while viewing occurs. Therefore they are not usually employed as alternative *channels* but as *topics* of conversation. Instead, this casual conversation relied on verbal and non-verbal communication channels, with family snapshots as a topic.

The implication for pedagogic practice is that since videos, television, overhead projectors etc. are, at least potentially generally available, in a setting which is conducive both to preparation and deployment, teachers should use such resources to full advantage. Given that learners differ in their preferred learning styles (McDonough and Shaw, 1993: 55; Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 68-69; Edwards, *et al.*, 1999: 127) it seems pedagogically desirable to do so. It is likely that media which provide simultaneous aural, visual and even tactile input (interactive CD-ROMs) can increase the efficacy of instruction by enhancing comprehension and helping to engage and maintain students' interest, thereby indirectly aiding or stimulating the cognitive processes required for second language acquisition (SLA). This alone however does not equate to enhanced conversational proficiency.

However, in common with Fisher (1984, cited in MacWilliam, 1986: 132), the author concedes that he is unsure of how effectively and in what ways learners process information presented concurrently through multiple sensory channels.

2.6 Message content.

Hymes loosely equated 'message content' with "topic, and change of topic" (Coulthard, 1985: 49), for which the author takes Richards *et al's* (1992: 384) definition: "what is talked..... about."

The presentation activity exemplifies a chief distinguishing feature of classroom discourse. Brazil (1995, reviewing Coulthard, *ibid.*), explains the point concisely:

The classroom lesson is perhaps the clearest example of an event in which what is talked about is under the virtually total control of one participant. Teachers are not only dominant in the sense that they control the development of the discourse. They also set the agenda and determine which student contributions will be admitted as relevant to that agenda and which will not. In this respect, classroom discourse is at an opposite pole to informal conversation, where special mechanisms are necessary for the negotiation of topic change.

(Brazil, 1995: 107)

Appendix 1 shows how tightly controlled the presentation was in order to adhere to the teacher's fixed agenda (explaining the semester's course of study). Distractions (transcript 7) and irrelevancies (transcript 8) were dealt with quickly to maintain focus.

Transcript 7 - Distractions.

Teacher: We'll use movie videos for that. Maybe Jumanji, James Bond
Saori: [Enters the classroom 17 minutes late and looks apologetically at the teacher]
Gomen nasai. [Sorry].
Teacher: You're late Saori. Come in and sit down. [Marks the register].
We'll use Jumanji, James Bond and Antz videos to show how you can start a conversation.

Transcript 8 - Irrelevancies.

Teacher: So that's the schedule for this semester.....this term. Any questions ?
Keiko: [Raises her hand]
Teacher: Yes, Keiko ?
Keiko: [In a quiet voice and an apologetic expression] Toilet ? [Students laugh].
Teacher: [Checks his watch, exasperated smile] Okay, but be quick.
Any questions ?

In common with much classroom discourse, the presentation was 'topic-centred' (Michaels and Cook-Gumperz, 1979, cited by Tannen, 1984: 224), i.e. it dealt, directly or indirectly with one core topic. It also exemplified what Brazil (1992: 5) called "data [existing] as an object", i.e. data to be presented and remembered. Finally, display and convergent questions and the initiation-response-feedback (IRF) exchange structure (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975, in Brazil, 1995 *passim*.) were used to guide students through the teacher's agenda (transcript 9).

Transcript 9 - The IRF exchange structure.

- Teacher: How else can we communicate ? [Long pause while students think].
Do we use only words to communicate ? Chiaki ? (Initiation and nomination).
- Chiaki: No. (Response).
- Teacher: That's right. (Follow-up).
What else do we use ? (Initiation).
- Chiaki: Gestures. (Response).
- Teacher: Yeah, gestures, our face, our body. (Follow-up). Non-verbal communication's important too, so we'll look at that. I have a Mr Beans video for that lesson.

By contrast, appendix 2 illustrates the wide range of topics which were initiated by various members of the family with a higher rate of topic turnover. Tannen (1994: 39-40) demonstrates that even if one participant had initiated more topics than others, he/she would not necessarily have dominated the conversation as the teacher did the lesson. Far from being 'topic-centred', an interruption provided an opportunity to change the topic rapidly (transcript 10), which supports Coulthard's (1985: 49) view that "topic is relatively unconstrained" during social discourse.

Transcript 10 - Rapid topic change and phatic communion.

- Lisa: Did you 'ave a good flight then ?
- Author: Yeah, not bad.
- Shaun: Cuppa tea anyone ?
- Lisa: Ooo yeah.
- Author: Yeah, that'd be nice.
- Lisa: Baby okay ?
- Author: Yeah, she's fine, causin' chaos as usual. I don't know how someone who can't even
walk yet can keep two grown adults so busy !

As Dornyei and Thurrell observed, this phenomenon is highly indicative of social speech:

Skimming over a considerable number of topics in a short span of time is, in fact, a characteristic feature of conversation, and it is important that students know how to do it smoothly.

(Dornyei and Thurrell, 1994: 43)

The casual conversation evidenced other antithetical traits. Brazil (1992: 5) sees data during conversation as "an event", rather than an object, i.e. having immediate and ongoing effects and consequences. Finally, in line with Thornbury (1996: 281) and Seedhouse (1996: 19), referential and divergent questions rather than display and convergent questions were used because participants either did not know the answers or wished to 'relinquish the floor'.

If these traits are typical of their respective genres, the apparent disparity raises further concerns as to the effectiveness of teaching conversation within a 'traditional' learning context. Both Brown (1994b: 237) and Stern identify the essential implication:

If classroom discourse is to reflect the characteristics of ordinary conversation..... the initiative for starting talk or determining topics should not be exercised by the teacher alone. There should be opportunities for students to take the initiative, and speech roles should be diversified, as is made possible through small group or pair work.

(Stern, 1992: 318)

It seems essential then to find a balance between the necessity to teaching students and giving them feedback on their performance and providing such opportunities for practising these conversational strategies and skills.

2.7 Message form.

Message form (together with key) is *how* something is said and chiefly concerns the two very closely related sociolinguistic concepts of politeness and 'face', of which Wardhaugh writes:

The concept of politeness owes a great deal to Goffman's original work (1967) on 'face'. In

discussing 'politeness'.....Brown and Levinson (1987, p.61) define *face* as 'the public self-

image that every member wants to claim for himself.' They also distinguish between positive face and negative face. *Positive face* is the desire to gain the approval of others.....*Negative face* is the desire to be unimpeded by others in one's actions.....*Positive politeness* leads to moves which achieve solidarity through offers of friendship, the use of compliments, and informal language use. On the other hand, *negative politeness* leads to deference, apologising, indirectness, and formality in language use.

(Wardhaugh, 1998: 272)

In other words, loosely speaking, positive face is the need to be valued by others and negative face is the need for autonomy, while politeness is the set of strategies (positive and negative) by which participants achieve and maintain these needs for themselves and others. Coulthard (1985: 50) further explains that when performing 'Face Threatening Acts' (FTA's, Goffman, 1976, cited by Coulthard, *ibid.*) such as disagreements, offers or requests, people minimise the potential for impoliteness or loss of face by assessing certain criteria to select the most appropriate grammatical form.

For Japanese people speaking Japanese, those criteria are, in descending order of importance, group (non)membership, relative social status, age and gender differences (Martin, 1964, cited by Wardhaugh, 1998: 276; Holmes, 1992: 271). If, as Beebe and Takahashi (1989: 105) demonstrated, Japanese also apply these politeness criteria when speaking English, then all four of the above points operated in the author's favour during the presentation. Students perceived the need to show respect, i.e. negative politeness, because he is not a member of the student body, he is their teacher, is older and is male. This is evident in their choices of form.

For example, in transcript 7, Saori apologised verbally and non-verbally for arriving late. Keiko also signalled apology non-verbally in transcript 8 when asking to use the washroom and showed deference by asking permission both to speak and leave. Also, in the data below, Chigusa showed deference and formality by the use of '*sensei*' and by asking for permission, both to speak and to retrieve her dictionary and she too apologised, both verbally and non-verbally.

Transcript 11

Chigusa: [Raises her hand.] Paul-*sensei*.
Teacher: Yeah ?

Chigusa: Can I go to my locker ? I forgot my dictionary.
 Teacher: Where are the lockers ? Will it take long ?
 Chigusa: [Gestures downwards]. First floor.
 Teacher: Will it take long ?
 Chigusa: [Thinks, then with rising intonation and an apologetic look] Three minutes.
 Teacher: OK, be quick please.
 Chigusa: [Leaves the room]
 Teacher: So, lot's of ways to use a dictionary. Speed's important too if you're using it during a
 conversation, so we'll do some practice for those things.
 }
 Chigusa: [Returns and sits down breathlessly] Sorry.
 Teacher: [Smiling] OK. You must be a pretty quick runner.

Use of such paralinguistic signals to augment the speaker's intended meaning during FTA's was noted by Cohen (1996: 407) as particularly common among Japanese.

The author (as teacher) reciprocated by attempting to mitigate the threats posed to students' face during his FTA's by using positive politeness. Brazil notes of this phenomenon that:

.....a lesson is a very face-threatening event from the viewpoint of the student. Being in a tightly controlled situation, in which the other participant is not only the knower but is licensed to manipulate you into saying what he wants said, and then adjudicates to its acceptability, can do little for one's self-esteem. It would be surprising if nothing happened to reduce the potential effects. Much of what might be interpreted as 'politeness' in other circumstances (outside the lesson) seems to have this function of protecting the students' self-esteem.

(Brazil, 1995: 108)

Such efforts are evidenced in transcripts 1a and 1b where the author used "let's" and "can you ~" to convert commands to 'requests', so reducing the threat to students' autonomy. Also, in 2a, emphasising the question's difficulty mitigated the loss of face someone might suffer had they answered incorrectly. Also, where any follow-up move overtly confirmed the student's answer as acceptable, he was enhancing the student's positive face, e.g. transcript 2b's "Yeah, that'll be fun". Though not indicated in the transcripts, the author also often used referring tone.

Though it is unclear what criteria the family members used to assess social distance, it is likely that they were, if not identical, then very similar to those used by

the Japanese. However, it is obvious from their choices of form that they perceived each other as social equals.

Transcript 12

- Shaun: I'm off to Sainsburys later. Anyone wan' anythin' ?
Lisa: Yeah, you wouldn' be able to get me some ciggies would you ?
Mother: [In a highly informal key] You'll be lucky. Don't buy her any. She's supposed to be giving up.
Lisa: I am.....I'm just doin' it slowly, that's all [everybody laughs].

Lisa's choice of form mitigates her request which threatens Shaun's autonomy, even though he initiated the offer, which is itself evidence of positive politeness. The mother then used a highly familiar form to show her disapproval but instead of taking offence, Lisa shrugged it off with a joke. This supports Brown's (1994b: 239) observation that conversation between equals is characterised by a reduced need for "social barriers" and 'guarded' words.

To summarise, the available data demonstrate that choices of message form differ between these two pieces of discourse in that while high levels of negative and positive politeness were used by students and teacher (respectively), the conversationalists generally discarded negative politeness in favour of the more informal, solidarity-affirming positive politeness. Further, these distinctions were due mainly to differences in participants' perceived social distance.

As with turn-taking, politeness and face-saving conventions are culture specific (Cook, 1989: 123; Beebe and Takahashi 1989: 104; Holmes, 1992: 305; Nunan, 1993: 96; Brown 1994b: 239; Dornyei and Thurrell, 1994: 47; Meier, 1997) and so present similar problems for learners whose cultural backgrounds contrast greatly from that of the target language. As Cook writes:

Informal spoken discourse is something in which the modern foreign language learner, with opportunities for travel and social contact, is more likely to wish to succeed, but also the discourse type he or she is likely to find hardest, precisely because it is informal and unpredictable. (Cook, 1989: 50)

Although Nunan (1991: 103) also notes that teaching these sociolinguistic differences is difficult, and Fairclough (1992: 162) concedes that Brown and

Levinson's original work fails to indicate the immense variability in politeness practices across cultures, Dornyei and Thurrell (1994: 47-48) argue that L2's politeness conventions (or what Meier, 1998 calls 'appropriateness') are teachable.

3 Which discourse type best highlights these features ?

Some of the above features are easier to identify in the presentation activity due to its highly structured and controlled nature. It is relatively simple for example, to identify the **participants'** roles during the presentation, i.e. who was controlling, who was subordinate and who the addressee(s), addressor, hearer(s) or speaker was/were (Coulthard, 1985: 45-47), because turns were generally strictly controlled. Conversely, in the conversation no-one was in control or subordinate and Hymes' four participant roles were often exchanged very rapidly, making identification difficult. **Channel** is also easier to identify here because as the author progressed through the presentation stage by stage, students were overtly directed to watch the video, look at the syllabus handout or the blackboard while also listening to the author's explanation. However, in conversation, verbal and non-verbal channels were used concurrently but without overt direction. Also, the presentation's **message content** is more readily identifiable because it was highly controlled, clearly 'compartmentalised' and "fully predetermined and invariable" (Coulthard, 1985: 49), i.e. it proceeded sequentially according to the teacher's pedagogic agenda. Conversely and in line with Nunan's definition of the genre (section 1), topics in the conversation were negotiable. Finally, the **purpose** of individual *speech acts* are generally very easy to identify in the presentation, largely due to the predictability of the IRF exchange sequence.

Other features are also better highlighted in the presentation but for reasons other than its highly structured format. Consistent with classroom discourse in general, the **purpose** of the presentation as part of a larger *speech event* (the lesson) was predictably, to inform and educate. The purpose of conversations as a genre is perhaps less predictable. The **setting** is also easier to identify here because it is constant from one lesson to the next, with respect both to time and place. Penultimately, the activity's **message form** (politeness and 'face') is more transparent because, due to the greater social distance between teacher and students than that between the conversationalists, it exhibited more frequent, overt and conspicuous efforts in politeness and face-saving strategies on all sides than did the conversation.

Finally, **key** is perhaps marginally better highlighted in the conversation because it exhibited a wider range of keys than did the presentation. The author might also suggest that those keys employed in the former were somehow more striking or conspicuous than those of the latter, though he concedes that this is an entirely subjective judgement.

It is ironic that most of the features of a framework originally intended to facilitate analysis of discourse in 'natural' settings are more readily identifiable in a discourse type which is in so many ways the antithesis of conversation: classroom discourse.

4 Conclusion.

Using Hymes' seven features of communicative competence as a framework, this paper has analysed data from a classroom presentation activity and a casual conversation and used them to exemplify the various characteristics which distinguish one from the other. The data clearly indicated that these two discourse activities differed greatly in many respects and the author presented various implications which these differences may have for the teaching of conversation through classroom discourse. He further suggested some solutions to offset some of these implications.

The chief distinguishing features and implications were firstly that the two physical settings differed greatly and that the classroom setting itself may promote a potentially counter-productive mindset among students because they associate it with the traditional classroom mode of 'speak when spoken to'. Also, the presentation's purpose, both at speech event and speech act levels was pedagogic, a purpose which is singularly inappropriate during conversation. Further, the teacher's controlling role impinged on speaking rights while these were negotiable during the conversation. Additionally, the presentation and conversation exposed learners to a generally mutually exclusive sets of keys and the presentation relied heavily on the IRF exchange sequence and display and closed questions commonly associated with classroom discourse while conversational speech was less formulaic and used antithetical question types. Penultimately, the students' perceived need to be polite often kept social barriers high and discourse on a formal footing which was not evident during the conversation. The implications here are that students may have problems adjusting their turn-taking, turn-length, keys, questioning and response behaviours and politeness conventions to fit those appropriate to casual conversation. Finally, the presentation used a wider range of channels, which may have beneficial effects upon learners' second language acquisition but not necessarily upon their conversational proficiency.

These two discourse activities and the genres they represent serve two very different functions, the needs to which both have been tailored. Nevertheless, it seems that teachers of conversation have a three-fold task. Firstly, to provide instruction in conversation through classroom discourse. Secondly, to supply sufficient opportunities for students to practice appropriate questioning and response behaviours, recognising and using indirect speech acts, using phatic function,

appropriate turn-taking and turn length conventions and keys, initiating or terminating conversations, changing topics and negotiation of meaning and to do all this in settings more commonly associated with conversation. Thirdly, to provide ample feedback to students on their performance. Without these provisions it seems unlikely that learners will make significant advances in their conversational proficiency.

5 Appendices.

Appendix 1 - The presentation activity's topical content.

Topic sequence	Initiated by	Changed
by Duration (minutes)		
Introducing the handout. 1	Teacher	Teacher
Starting a conversation Teacher 4	Teacher	
Using questions during conversation. 3	Teacher	Teacher
Non-verbal communication. 12	Teacher	Teacher
Aspects of fluency. 3	Teacher	Teacher
Dictionary skills. 2	Teacher	Chigusa
Going to the locker to get a dictionary. Teacher 2	Chigusa	
Dictionary skills Teacher 8	Teacher	
The importance of grammar. 1	Teacher	Teacher
Turning down the air conditioner. 1	Teacher	Teacher
The importance of grammar. 2	Teacher	Teacher
Basic sociolinguistics. 7	Teacher	Teacher
Finishing conversations. Teacher 5	Teacher	
Summary. 2	Teacher	Teacher
Which topics students might find most interesting. 2	Teacher	Teacher
Students' question to teacher. 3	Teacher	Keiko
Keiko's use of the washroom	Keiko	Teacher

1

Students' question to teacher

Teacher

Teacher

3

Topic turnover = 18 topics in 62 minutes

Appendix 2 - The casual conversation's topical content (sample only).

Topic sequence			Initiated
by	Changed by	Duration (mins)	
The author's flight.			Lisa
	Shaun	1	
Offers to make tea.			Shaun
	Lisa	1	
The author's daughter's health.			
Lisa	Lisa	1	
The duration of the author's stay in England.			Lisa
	Mother	2	
Meeting one of the author's friends.			Mother
	Lisa	2	
Looking at the author's family photographs.			Lisa
	Mother	4	
The family's trip to Tokyo Disneyland.			
Mother	Mother	6	
The mother's upcoming trip to Australia.			Mother
	Mother	4	
How the author's English garden in Japan is progressing.			Mother
	Shaun	3	
How the author's work is going.			Shaun
	Mother	2	
How the author's wife is coping with her work and the baby.			
Mother	Author	1	
The author's MA studies and the need for a new computer.			Author
	Mother	3	
The mother's voluntary position as secretary for her office's social club.			
Mother	Author	2	
Giving Lisa's children the author's computer.			Author
	Mother	8	

Christmas presents.			Mother
Shaun	3		
Going shopping at Sainsbury.			Shaun
Mother	1		
Lisa's giving up smoking.			Mother
Shaun	1		
Saving money			Shaun
Author	2		

Topic turnover = 18 topics in 47 minutes

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