ACTION RESEARCH INVESTIGATING THE AMOUNT OF TEACHER TALK IN MY CLASSROOM

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Assignment # 1

Devise and conduct a piece of research which will investigate the amount of talk you do in your classroom. A short introductory section should summarise findings to date in the area you are investigating. You should make a list of expectations/hypotheses before implementing the research. These should be based on the following pre-research self-evaluation.

Amount of time I think I spend talking in class	0-20%	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%
Amount of time I think I should spend talking in class	0-20%	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%

On analysing your results, do you find your expectations fulfilled. Do you feel you need to make any changes to the amount of (verbal) input you provide for your students? Describe and justify the changes you would make.

1 Introduction

In this qualitative action research project, I intend to discover a pattern in the percentage of my teacher talk time which I regard excessive. From the findings I aim to develop an awareness of my teaching practice and ways to avoid 'needless or over-lengthy explanations and instructions' (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 114), or refine my questioning and explanations methods. Furthermore, through this research, I hope to become more conscious of, and develop, successful ways to address L2 learners with effective 'presentation' techniques (Ur, 1991: 11). Considering the limited amount of oral language practice time L2 learners have access to, the degree to which teacher talk dominates language lessons is an often debated and researched topic. Following the recent trend towards more 'learner-centred' teaching strategies, Nunan (1991: 198) states:

> Research…shows that teachers need to pay attention to the amount and type of talking they do, and to evaluate its effectiveness in the light of their pedagogical objectives. (1991: 198)

Burns (1999: 12) supports this by suggesting: 'Researching one's own classrooms and teaching concepts (is) a realistic extension of professional practice.' By this they highlight that an awareness of one's own teaching practice can lead to greater L2 learner opportunities.

Teachers are estimated to talk between 60-75% of the time (Goodlad, 1984 noted by Crandall, in Arnold, 1999: 235), and as Brown states: 'our… inclination as teachers…to talk too much!' (Brown, 2001: 154). Holland and Shortall (1998: 77) point out that in L2 classrooms, the amount of teacher talk resembles that of first language classrooms. Concerning to what degree such a high proportion of teacher talk time or 'linguistic exchanges' is conducted at the expense of others (McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 109), Nunan (1991: 190) explains that while excessive teacher talk is to be avoided,

understanding what is ‘excessive’ is subjective. He argues that teacher talk is necessary to provide learners with what can be their only access to live target language input, something Brown is wary of:

> Teacher talk should not occupy the major proportion of a class hour; otherwise you are probably not giving students enough opportunity to talk. (2001: 99)

Lesson type also needs consideration. As Crandall (noted in Arnold, 1999: 235) points out, in a cooperative structure the distribution of teacher talk is almost reverse that of a ‘traditional’ lesson, with a much-reduced teacher-contribution. This supports Harmer’s ‘Communicative output’ stage (Harmer, 1991: 49); while students are engaged in communicative activities, intervention by the teacher is to be avoided. Harmer asserts that to do such ‘would undermine the purpose of the activity’. Therefore, as Edwards and Westgate (noted by Van Lier in Candlin and Mercer, 2001: 91) note, students ‘have only very restricted opportunities to participate in the language of the classroom’. One way to reduce such ‘highly controlling’ and ‘depersonalized teacher talk’ is to modify it in more-contingent directions (Bruner, 1983 noted by Van Lier in Candlin and Mercer, 2001: 104). In other words, Bruner warns that the teacher should always be aware of the conditions under which the learners might be ready to become ‘more autonomous language users’. Such an increase in ‘learner-centred’, autonomous approaches should see a reduction in teacher talk.

2 Summary of findings to date

2.1 Pre-research self-evaluation.

Prior to undertaking this action research, I, as teacher/researcher, am concerned that I talk excessively during lessons. Feeling uncomfortable during silences, even though students are ‘on task’, I am worried that I inadvertently disturb the ‘pacing’ of the lesson (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 114), and students’ concentration, by verbally interjecting. The lesson thus loses its momentum, resulting in the need for a more structured lesson plan (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 114). I need to adopt, and have access to, a reflective “objective” view of what transpires during the class period (Schratz, in Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 11).

Table 1 below indicates my current expectations of amount of teacher talk:

(i) Amount of time I think I spend talking in class	0-20%	20-40%	**40-60%**	60-80%	80-100%
(ii) Amount of time I think I should spend talking in class	0-20%	**20-40%**	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%

The above discrepancy between (i) and (ii), suggests that, at between 40% and 60%, too much time is ‘teacher-led’ (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 148). More precisely, the anticipated teacher talk percentage lies at approximately 50%. For the target group, a figure between 20 and 29% is preferred, accounting for between about 13 and 20 minutes of an average lesson.

2.2 Hypotheses.

The following hypotheses anticipate areas necessitating improvement:

1. Unsuccessfully judging and attuning to the current stages of the learners' second language acquisition and ability, I fail to balance the amount of teacher talk (TT) I do.

2. TT tends to veer off task, or there is too much elaboration. More students' inference could be achieved by simplifying TT.

3. Teacher's verbal input should be reduced, allowing learners more time to practice communicatively.

2.3 Expectations.

The following expectations address how to counter each hypothesis:

1. Familiarising myself with the students' OC proficiency level and learner strategies, leaning away from teacher-dependent activities, and promoting and increasing learner-involvement (Burns, 1999: 57), the need for teacher talk will be reduced.

2. Additional lesson planning will restrict boundaries of TT. Simpler class materials requiring fewer instructions, married to a clear lesson structure, will reduce TT. Students should receive greater opportunities to self-discover language. Measuring utterance length (Chaudron, 1988: 73), I will better judge my presentation's success in mediating material in a form accessible and beneficial to learners (Ur, 1991: 11).

3. I should make a clear distinction between what Lightbrown and Spada refer to as: 'Structure-based. A whole lesson - or segment thereof – is organized around a specific feature of the language and error correction is frequent. Communication-based. The lesson focuses primarily on meaning and the communication of messages. Error correction is… usually brief….' (1999: 106)

Upon assessing the goals and towards whom the lesson is focused, I should make more informed decisions about how to adopt more student-led activities.

3 Method

3.1 Situation and class dynamics.

A Japanese private high school class. Thirteen 16-year-old girls in their fourth academic year of EFL. I, a native English speaker with 6 years' of TEFL, teach the Friday afternoon English Oral Communication lesson. The course book, *Passport: English for International Communication*, encourages use of the four-macro skills. Eight of the 13 students will study abroad for 10 months, leaving before the end of the academic year. There are six classes of EFL per week; five by a JTE, one by a native speaker.

The results of a questionnaire completed by the students in their L1 shows the students' preferred learner styles for L2 OC lessons and personality factors:

Table 2 Learner types and personality factors of target group.

Learner types; Personality factors	Description	# of students (out of 13)
'concrete' learners	Learners tend to like games, pictures, films, video, using cassettes, talking in pairs and practicing English outside class.	3
'analytical' learners	Learners like studying grammar, English books, studying alone, finding their own mistakes and working on teacher-set problems.	1
'communicative' learners	Learners tend to like learning by watching TV in English, listening to NSs*, talking to friends in English, learning new words by hearing and conversations.	8
'authority-oriented' learners	Prefer the teacher to explain everything, like to have own textbook, to write everything in a notebook, to study grammar, learn by reading, learn words by seeing them.	1

*native speakers (taken and adapted from Nunan, 1991: 170)

Clearly, very few of the students expect me to singly provide them with knowledge. Most are ready and willing to exert an effort for L2 acquisition by themselves.

3.2 Speaking proficiency.

Table 3 Target group learner speaking proficiency*

Proficiency level	Generic description	# students
Intermediate	- ability to create with the language. Combining and recombining learned elements, though primarily in a reactive mode; - initiate, minimally sustain, and close in a simple way basic communicative tasks; - ask and answer questions.	
Intermediate-Low	Can successfully handle a limited number of interactive, task-oriented, and social situations. Can ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, maintain face-to-face conversation, but highly restricted and containing much linguistic inaccuracy. Can introduce self, order a meal, give directions, make purchases. Vocabulary adequate to express elementary needs. Strong inference from native language may occur. Misunderstandings frequently arise, but with repetition Intermediate-Low speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.	7
Intermediate-Mid	Can successfully handle various uncomplicated, basic, communicative tasks and social situations. Can talk simply about self and family members. Can ask and answer questions and participate in simple conversations on topics beyond most immediate needs. Utterance length increases slightly, speech characterized by frequent long pauses. Incorporation of smooth basic conversational strategies often hindered as speaker struggles to create appropriate language forms. Pronunciation may continue to be influenced by L1. Misunderstandings may still arise, but the Intermediate-Mid speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.	5
Intermediate-High	Can successfully handle most uncomplicated communicate tasks and social situations. Can initiate, sustain, and close a general conversation using various strategies appropriate to a range of topics and circumstances, but errors are evident. Limited vocabulary necessitates hesitation. Some slightly unexpected circumlocution. Evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description. The Intermediate-High speaker can generally be understood, but repetition may be required.	1

*based upon ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 1986 (in Brown, H. 2001: 100)

The information in tables 2 and 3 confirms my suspicion that if teacher talk time reaches as much as 50 per cent with the target group, then clearly the students receive far too few opportunities to self-create and discover language. To continue with such TTT

would shift learner-autonomy back to that seen in the traditional large-group classroom. However, for as long as students expect the native teacher's OC lesson style to differ from that of the Japanese Teacher of English, and provided those expectations can be catered for, students' preferences when planning and organising L2 presentation and practice (Ur, 1991: 10) must be considered. Furthermore, the groupings in table 3 are not truly indicative of the students' overall L2 ability; the students have received high exposure to what Lightbrown and Spada (1999: 106) refer to as 'communicative-based' and 'structure-based' reading and writing. Because 7 learners are categorised as Intermediate-Mid, and 1 as Intermediate-High, I am not the only proficient speaker (Lightbrown and Spada, 1999: 94), so high dependency on me for models of L2 is not pronounced (Brown, 2001: 99). I should decrease superfluous support and expect the learners to take increasing responsibility for performance (Burns and Joyce, 1997: 99). According to Slimani (In Candlin and Mercer, 2001: 297), should learners have opportunities to initiate topics, topicalisation will provide many more chances for learner uptake and recall.

3.3 Self-observation model – Data collection.

Data were collected in two parts; an audio-recording of one lesson, and subsequent analysis and assessment of the amount of teacher talk time (TTT). Then a further audio-recording of a new lesson, followed by an additional analysis, the intention being to judge whether gaining an awareness of areas of excessive TTT provides the grounding for change in teacher presentation and practice (Ur. 1991: 10). Observations were conducted over both lessons' full period for analyses to be made of whole-lesson TTT.

I employed a system of recording that would fit in with the activities of the lesson (Burns 1999: 81), considering McDonough and McDonough's (1997: 10) claim that:

> Introducing a tape-recorder into the class can … distract attention.

I wore a concealed, inconspicuous pocket-sized tape recorder and clip on microphone.

Despite receiving the students' prior consent to undertake action research during their lessons, I elected not to inform them of exact taping occasions to minimize distraction, and reduce interference of variables such as atypical student behaviour. Later investigation of recorded TTT would allow me to become more aware of my moment-to-moment decisions in the classroom (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 3).

4 Results of lesson one – Analysis of teacher talk time

4.1 Amount of teacher talk.

Teacher talk is recorded in seconds.

Table 4 Amount of teacher talk time (TTT).

Total lesson length: 3, 861 seconds (64 minutes, 21 seconds)

	Actual speaking time in seconds	**Total TTT** (including pauses)
Time in seconds	1039	**2051**
%age of lesson time	26.9	**53.1**

Table 4 indicates that TTT is represented two ways as a means to calculate time lost that could otherwise have been more constructive and student-initiated:

- Actual teacher speaking time of 1039 seconds (17 minutes, 19 seconds), excluding any breaks in speech - pauses, wait time, thinking time, etc. - accounted for 26.9% of lesson time.
- Total teacher talk time (34 minutes, 11 seconds), at 53.1% of lesson time, included natural pauses in discourse, time spent thinking, waiting, or drawing/ writing on the blackboard during explanations, etc.

Therefore, of total TTT, 50.7% was actual speaking time, and 49.3% was spent pausing between utterances and sentences, and student thinking time and responses. Although only 26.9% was actual teacher speech, it is assumed that pauses during teacher speech are also classifiable as teacher talk, provided they are part an internal part of an event (see 4.2.1). The percentage in bold type of 53.1% in table 4 therefore needs lowering to match the hopes of the pre-research (see 2.1: ii). Lesson one therefore indeed contained an excess of teacher talk, which asserts that too much time was ‘teacher-fronted’.

4.2.1 Teacher talk time events.

Breaking down TTT in order to see to whom utterances were addressed, Table 5 below records what I shall refer to as 'events', particular instances when speech is exchanged (Richards, J. 1992: 345). They include any number of interconnected teacher utterances and sentences, of varying speech length (see table 6), started by an opener, and clearly ended. Events included pauses such as silences, wait time, and time to draw/write on the blackboard. Interjection/ responses by students occurred, but the teacher maintained direction over the discourse of topic or theme. (See appendix 1.)

Table 5 Length of individual speaking events– raw data.

Teacher roles (Points 1 to 3)	**a). Teacher talk time data (seconds) 'events' (include pauses in speech)**	**Total (seconds)**	**%age of TTT**	**Mean time+ (seconds)**
1. Teacher-fronted talk time to whole group	287, 6, 2, 3, 61, **15***, 4, 3, 19, 2, 2, 48, 3, 37, 144, 3, 5, 70, 224, 3, 105, 2, 7, 195, 100, 20, 45, 7	1422	69.3	51
2. Teacher involved in class activity	187, 155	342	16.7	171
3. Teacher addresses small group/individual	13, 3, 3, 8, 3, 4, 13, 1, 35, 2, 2, 2, 6, 5, 7, 4, 7, 3, 4, 6, 3, 22, 4, 4, 73, 3	287	14	11

*Data in bold type of 15 seconds transcribed in appendix 1. +Rounded to the nearest second.

4.2.2 Explanation and results of teacher role – Table 5 (a).

Teacher roles were categorised three ways:

1. 28 events. 69.3% of TTT (36.83% of lesson time) was teacher-fronted, students having little or no initiative or control over their learning. 'Passive' to the learning process as interlocutors, students' responses were mostly directed at the teacher, meaning too little student-student L2 discourse occurred.

2. 2 events. 16.7% of total TTT (8.9% of lesson time) was spent on the teacher eliciting from the students, or taking part in the activity. Students provided responses, played an active communicative role in that segment of the lesson, and had some control over their learning, but the teacher remained integral to the exercise.

3. 26 events. Indicates that the teacher communicated with individual students or small groups for 14% of TTT (7.4% of lesson time). Consisted chiefly of short exchanges (mean average 8.2 seconds, excluding atypical 'scene' time of 73 seconds).

4.2.3 Commentary on points 1 to 3 – table 5.

- Point 1. Four events were excessively long: 287, 144, 224, and 195. Some of that lesson time taken up by the teacher could have been 'handed over' to the students to practice more student-based communicative tasks.
- Point 2. Table 4 shows that 53.1% of the lesson contained TTT. Subtracting the 342 seconds incurred through the 'teacher involved in group activity' category, hence 'learner opportunities', there still remains a disproportionate TTT of 44.3%.
- Point 3. Most TTT was small group-focused. Individuals were addressed in only 14 units from the total 26 events (see table 7). Most TT was therefore whole group focused. Individual students seldom had inclination to, or found opportunities to, address the teacher directly. Consistent with the learner types categories (table 2), the students prefer working with one another. However, with only 13 students in the class, a more 'personal' teaching style should be adopted, the teaching becoming more of a 'facilitator' (Underhill, in Arnold, 1999: 135), trusting students' capacity, control becoming more decentralized and autonomous.

4.3 Tally and timing sheet results.

Table 6 Tally and timing sheet results. Categories and frequencies of teacher talk.

Teacher speech type	Description		(a) Frequency (Units of speech)	(b)Actual teacher speaking time (seconds)	(c) %age of total teacher speaking time*
1. Display questions	T asks Ss a question to which T knows the answer	a) to whole group	18	58	5.6
		b) to individuals	5	14	1.3
2. Referential questions	T asks Ss question to which T does not know the answer	a) to whole group	14	48	4.6
		b) to individuals	5	11	1.1
3. Instructions	T gives instructions or directions	a) to whole group	21	158	15.1
		b) to individuals	2	5	0.5
4. Explanations	T explains a point. (Grammatical, meaning of a vocabulary item, functional point, or relating to content (theme/topic) of the lesson		25	396	38.4
5. Elicitation	T elicits sentences, words etc from the Ss - whole group		15	71	6.8
6. Error correction or negotiation	T corrects errors, or T negotiates meanings with Ss	a) to whole group	5	83	8.0
		b) to individual	2	10	1.0
7. Answering questions	T responds to or answers questions	a) Ss' questions	3	9	1.0
		b) T's questions	3	15	0.9
8.Repetition or clarification	T asks Ss to repeat or clarify a point		6	12	1.4
	T repeats or clarifies a point to Ss		10	37	3.5
9. T praises	T praises Ss answers, efforts, etc		4	10	1.0
10. Other	Agreeing with Ss, attracting Ss' attention, joking, teasing, etc		21	102	9.8

Total		159	1039	100%

*percentages correct to one decimal point. (Partially cited in Holland and Shortall, 2001: 38, and Lightbrown and Spada 1999: 94 and 104)

4.3.1 Commentary on table 6.

In order to further dissect TT, a tally of (a) frequencies and (b) talk time was segregated into 10 categories - five each contain two sub-categories. Although not an exhaustive measuring system, it captures the majority of speech types in lesson one. Category 10 includes speech acts deemed inapplicable to 1 –9 and contains only 21 of 159 speech units. Prominent points are:

1. The frequency of, and length of, display questions exceeded that of referential ones. More questioning methods encouraging student participation could have seen a production of challenging language and L2 contribution to student discourse.

2. Most instructional time was warranted. However, a sizeable proportion of activities required long explanations. Clearly at 38.4% of teacher speaking time and 10.3% of total lesson time, such excess should be cut using pre-prepared props, as an overwhelming amount of teacher talk was produced simultaneously to board writing, resulting in reduced word-per-minute count. The students laughed and joked about my inaptitude at artwork. This resulted in me clownishly 'playing to the crowd'. Upon further reflection, the students' oral communication skills benefited little from such conduct. I should have moved the students on to the task sooner.

4.4 Commentary on taxonomy of actual teacher speech units table 7.

Assimilating where teacher speech types occur to judge their relevance to the learning taking place, group-directed teacher speech acts - including explanations - dominated teacher talk, suggesting that I stayed front-of-class. Students seldom questioned me, meaning they did not feel the lesson student-centred enough to warrant it. Perhaps the obedient and non-disruptive nature of the group meant they merely saw my presentation as similar to their whole group 'Japanese style' teacher-fronted lesson. This, however, goes against the students' expectations and teacher's intentions for such a small group OC lesson, during which students should be able to capitalise on opportunities rarely affordable to such small groups.

Table 7 A taxonomy of actual teacher speech units lesson one– raw data (seconds)

Teacher speech types	Activity types (see table 6)						
	1 Explain, draw, write	**2** Group elicitation	**3** Pairs role-play	**4** Dialogue reading	**5** Listening, elicitation	**6** Pairs role-play	**7** Writing
1. Display questions	Whole group						
	2,4,2,2,2	5,3		3,2,3,5	6,5,2,3,3,3	3	
	Individuals						
	2,5,3,2,2						
2. Referential questions	Whole group						
	4,3,4	2,6,4,5	4	3,2,3,3,2		3	
	Individuals						
				3,2		2	2,2
3. Instructions	Whole group						
	28,7,5,5,4,1,2, 16		2,4,17	6,6,6	8,5	18,7,5	5,1
	Individuals						
					3		2

Table 7 A taxonomy of actual teacher speech units lesson one– raw data (seconds) continued.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Explanations	75,27,7,3,3,3, 5,38,13,4,3, 38,1,55	6,11,8		6,7,35	10	15,16	2,5
5. Elicitation	6,3,3,2	1,1,1,12,4,2, 2,18,5			4	7	
6. Error correction or negotiation	Whole group						
	8,16			43	6	10	
	Individuals						
				6		4	
7. Answering questions	Ss' questions						
					2	3	4
	T's questions						
	3,7,5						

Table 7 A taxonomy of actual teacher speech units lesson one– raw data (seconds) continued.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. **Repetition or clarification**	T asks Ss to repeat or clarify						
				2	2,2,2,1		3
	T repeats or clarifies a point to Ss						
	3,4,2,3,2	8		5,6	2,2		
9. **T praises**	1,6	2				1	
10. **Other**	10,2,3,2,2,6,4	8,1,2,4,5,2		3,11,1,5	3		4,6,18

For more detailed explanation on activity types, see table 8.

Pin-pointed areas requiring further commentary:

During long teacher explanations and some instructions, much board work occurred, meaning that actual teacher speaking time, married to related pauses, made total TTT excessive. This exemplifies that a disproportionate time was spent on explanations and instructions. (See table 4 for ratio of actual speaking time to TTT)

In line with Long and Sato's (1993) observation (noted in Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 187), during whole-group addresses, display questions dominated. The predominance of such questions failed to 'generate student ideas and classroom communication' (Long and Sato).

4.5.1 Activity types.

Table 8 Breakdown of activity types and amount of teacher talk

Activity type	%age of lesson time on activity	Frequency of actual teacher speaking*	%age of activity spent by actual teacher speaking time
1. T explains activity. Ss draw small picture in notebooks, write situational English sentences.=	20.1 775 seconds	58 483 seconds	To whole group 60.5 To individuals 1.8
2. T elicits Ss' situational English sentences. Whole group participate.	15.8 611 seconds	26 128 seconds	21
3. Stand up. Role-play. Ss practice elicited phrases in pairs/ groups.	7.9 306 seconds	4 27 seconds	8.8
4. Ss read Passport textbook dialogues. Teacher checks understanding.	12.9 497 seconds	26 179 seconds	To whole group 33.8 To individuals 2.2
5. Listen to tape. Fill in blanks in the textbook. T elicits responses.	14.8 570 seconds	20 74 seconds	13
6. Role play. Ss in pairs practice controlled structure-based dialogues.	10.7 414 seconds	13 94 seconds	22.7
7. Write in Passport Workbook. Ss work individually but can confer.	14.8 571 seconds	12 54 seconds	9.5
Total	97.0~ 3744 seconds+	159 1039 seconds	(**Mean Ave. 24.8 per activity type**)

*means Total Units of. (See Table 6 for teacher speech type categories.)
+117 seconds short of 3,861 seconds lesson length.
=The very short procedural factors are categorised as a part of activity type 1.
~The activities accounted for 97% of lesson time, a discrepancy of 117 seconds. 'Lost' time ending one activity and preparing the next contained little or no teacher talk of relevance to this research.

The lesson was categorised into seven activity types as above (table 8) for a clearer picture of how TT was spread out. Two salient features need clarification:

- Activity one contained far too much TT, suggesting that the writing time for the

activity was severely compromised.

- For a role-play, activity 6 should not have seen so much TT, especially as the teacher was supposedly 'uninvolved'.

4.5.2 Activity type and teacher talk appropriateness.

Correlating activity types (table 8) with learner types (table 2), we can observe the relationship between activity-time-allocation and students' learner types and personality factors.

- Activity types 1 and 2, and parts of activities 3, 5, 6 were most suited to 'communicative' learners at 61.5% of the class. Amounting to 69.3% of lesson time, one could suggest that a reasonably close correlation between learner type and activity existed. 'Communicative' learners benefit from 'listening to the teacher, talking to friends in English, and learning new words by hearing and conversations' (Nunan, 1991: 170), but might not have received maximum advantage from a part of the activity more suited to a 'concrete' learner. The 'communicative' learners, although seemingly favouring listening to native speaker speech, tend to learn better through involvement in hearing. More L2 conversations with friends would have increased their learner chances and uptake.
- 'Concrete' learners, at 23.1% of students, most likely benefited from communicative-based activity 4 and part of activities 3, 5 and 6, accounting for 46.3% of lesson time. Benefiting from the use of pictures, cassettes, and talking in pairs, they did not respond well to 'eyes front', watching the teacher style. They should have been handed more opportunities for communicative-based, speaking practice in pairs, and less teacher talk.
- The one 'Authority-oriented' learner, at 7.7% of the group, received the most benefit

from a long teacher explanation, and structure-based activity 7; writing in a workbook and studying grammar (Nunan, 1991: 170). Those activities, totalling 34.9% of lesson time, arguably provided the learner with an abundance of learner uptake opportunities. Possibly satisfied by listening to lengthy teacher explanations, this learner would also have benefited from more reading exercises.

- The 'analytical' learner, also 7.7% of the group, benefited from part of activity 2 - grammar-based sentences elicitation - the structure-based dialogues part of activity 6, and activity 7 - individual writing in workbook. Activities 2, 6, and 7 in total amounted to 41.3%. Thus, one could claim that the learner received a greater number of learning opportunities that the majority groups. This learner ought to have received greater self-study time, obtainable had the teacher reduced spoken explanations and instructions.

4.6 Code switching.

Table 9 Code switching. Percentage of teacher speech units.

Language	Seconds of actual speaking time	Frequency of actual teacher speaking	% actual teacher speaking time
Target language – English as a Foreign Language	1027	152	98.4
Students' vernacular (Japanese)	17	7	1.6

L2, at 98.4% of actual teacher speaking time, is consistent with learner proficiency and principally justified: to give directions, clarify the procedures to be undertaken in the activity, and check understanding (Richards and Lockhart, 1996).

Vernacular use reinforced points previously presented in L2. Such limited use of

L1 created little impedance of exposure L2. Being familiar with Japanese, I could increase L1 to moderate lengthy L2 teacher explanations. Doing so would allow word-per-minute count in the vernacular to surpass that of L2 and reduce TTT. The less time the learners have to listen to L2 lengthy teacher explanations in L2, the sooner they can begin a student-centred activity of arguably more benefit. L1 should not exceed 10% of actual teacher speaking time, but could simultaneously cut TTT by 16%.

4.7 Rate of speech

Reduction of speech rate to accord with the learners' levels of proficiency (Holland and Shortall, 2000: 78) was employed and measured. According to Chaudron's studies (1988: 66-77), teachers of intermediate learners lessen their rate of speech on average to around 130 words-per-minute. The following average rates* (in seconds) were recorded in lesson one:

- Explanations – 102wpm.
- Instructions – 107wpm.
- Other teacher speech types – 112wpm.

Should I pre-plan effective word-use, my presentation and TTT would become clearer and more concise, and attuned to students' proficiency. Thus, I could slightly increase my speech rate without detriment to the learners' uptake.

* These rates are extrapolations from several utterances lasting up to 10 seconds and are to be viewed with caution.

4.8 Hypotheses review.

4.8.1 Correlation of findings.

This review judges the accuracy of the hypotheses (see 2.2):

1. Still not fully attuned to the learners' current stages of L2 acquisition, my rate of speech is arguably too low and explanations occupy too much lesson time. I will try to rectify these in lesson two.

2. Simplification of teacher talk would have allowed an increase in speech rate. Lesson two needs less elaboration and more students-on-task time, letting the students produce the fun environment.

3. Students would have benefited from having more opportunities to become involved in student-student dialogues. A secondary factor is how little teacher-single student interaction there was. More provision should be made for teacher-individual learner encounters, especially student initiated.

4.9 Learner-autonomy.

There remains a necessity for more student-say in learner opportunities. In agreement with Bruner's (1993) 'handover' stage (Van Lier, in Candlin and Mercer, 2001: 104), and wanting to provide for more learner-autonomy, I conducted an interview with two students I felt would provide enough insight and act as a 'mouthpiece' for the other class members. (Transcript in appendix two.) The unanticipated findings raise important salient issues:

1. Five of the students' six-weekly 70-minute periods of English are purely reading-based. Expressing displeasure with those lessons, the students could not aver their attitude for English.
2. Becoming shy of OC and at a critical stage of learning, students feel over-pressured and

de-motivated by error correction. They expressed their recent disappointment at their English reading and grammar test results, but conversely not with other foreign languages studied.

3. The interviewees revealed that the class likes listening to native speakers. Be this true for the remaining members is a moot point, but with over half the group in the same category, it could be valuable to increase and expand their listening chances. However, it should not take over as a compensatory measure for students' reluctance to speak.
4. The seating layout is to be changed to a more 'member-friendly' U-shape, in which the members can interact more.

In lesson two the many changes I will implement will consider the students' opinions and concerns.

5 Results of lesson two – Analysis of teacher talk time

5.1 Amount of teacher talk lesson two – comparisons with lesson one.

In lesson two students were absent (one 'concrete' learner of Intermediate-low; one 'communicative' learner of Intermediate-mid – see tables 2 and 3), but this did not adversely affect TTT.

Table 10 Amount of teacher talk time (TTT) lesson two.

Total lesson length: 4,085 seconds (68 minutes, 5 seconds)

	Actual speaking time in seconds	**Total TTT** (including pauses)
Time in seconds	688	**1059**
%age of lesson time	16.8	**26**

TTT is again represented two ways:

- In accordance with the hopes of the table 1 (ii), actual teacher speaking time was successfully reduced by 10% from lesson from to 688 seconds (11 minutes, 28 seconds), equating to only 16.9% of lesson time.
- Through better pre-lesson planning, and less elaboration, total TTT (17 minutes, 39 seconds) amounted to 25.9% of lesson time. This reduction manages to align with expectations.

Fewer speech pauses rendered actual teacher speaking time at 65.1% of TTT (compared to 50.7% during lesson one), achievable by having had a clearer idea of presentation. Board work was reduced during TTT, resulting in shorter 'events' (see table 11), and creating clearer speech; material was predominantly presented and explained facing the students, leading to less loss of understanding.

5.2 Teacher talk time events - lesson two.

Table 11 Length of individual speaking 'events'– raw data lesson two.

Teacher roles (Points 1 to 3)	**a). Teacher talk time data (seconds) 'events' (include pauses in speech)**	**Total (seconds)**	**%age of TTT**	**Mean time* (seconds)**
1. Teacher-fronted talk time to whole group	19, 23, 16, 48, 12, 16, 7, 10, 10, 20, 2, 3, 2, 5, 10, 9, 42, 6, 30, 60, 10, 29, 16,10, 46, 6, 8, 2, 30, 12, 9, 39, 57, 37, 4, 3, 3, 9, 12, 2, 22, 22, 63, 3, 9, 16	829	78.3	18
2. Teacher involved in class activity	42, 15, 32, 19, 9, 10,	127	12	21
3. Teacher addresses small group/individual	10, 3, 10, 15, 37, 6, 4, 2, 16,	103	9.7	11

*rounded to the nearest second.

Teacher roles.

1. Teacher fronted talk time - 78.3% of TTT – exceeded that of lesson one by 9%. The 46 events amounted to just 829 seconds, compared to 1422 seconds, 28 events, in lesson one. Markedly, mean average event time was reduced by 33 seconds.
2. Teacher-involved events amounted to six, four more than lesson one, but talk time percentage was cut by 4.7%, average mean time by 51 seconds.
3. Addressing small group/ individuals, accounting to 9.7%, fell by 4.3% from lesson one. Although 15 fewer than in lesson one, the nine events were noticeably principally student-generated and mini-conversational. The mean average length remained unchanged at 11%, but having handed the students more opportunities to speak, they took direction and seized the chances to take risks and be autonomous.

5.3 Tally and timing sheet results – lesson two.

Table 12 Tally and timing sheet results. Categories and frequencies of teacher talk – lesson two.

Teacher speech type	Description		(a) Frequency	(b)Actual teacher speaking time (seconds)	(c) %age of total teacher speaking time
1. Display questions	T asks Ss a question to which T knows the answer	a) to whole group	0	0	0
		b) to individuals	0	0	0
2. Referential questions	T asks Ss question to which T does not know the answer	a) to whole group	3	10	1.5
		b) to individuals	0	0	0
3. Convergent questions	T asks Ss question requiring short answers	a) to whole group	4	9	1.3
		b) to individuals	0	0	0
4. Divergent questions	T asks Ss a question requiring a longer response and thought processing (addressed only to individuals)		6	22	3.2
5. Instructions	T gives instructions or directions	a) to whole group	18	117	17
		b) to individuals	1	6	0.9
6. Explanations	T explains a point. (Grammatical, meaning of a vocabulary item, functional point, or relating to content (theme/topic) of the lesson		42	236	34.3
7. Elicitation	T elicits sentences, words etc from the Ss - whole group		12	39	5.7
8. Error correction or negotiation	T corrects errors, or T negotiates meanings with Ss	a) to whole group	2	5	0.7
		b) to individual	0	0	0
9. Answering questions	T responds to or answers questions	a) Ss' questions	7	28	4.1
		b) T's questions	0	0	0

Table 12 Tally and timing sheet results. Categories and frequencies of teacher talk – lesson two continued.

10. Repetition or clarification	T asks Ss to repeat or clarify a point	5	24	3.5
	T repeats or clarifies a point to Ss	1	6	0.9
11. T praises	T praises Ss answers, efforts, etc	5	12	1.8
12. Interaction	T checks Ss' comprehension	4	10	1.5
13. Procedural	T organises Ss, takes register, etc	9	37	5.4
14. Other	Agreeing with Ss, attracting Ss' attention, joking, teasing, etc	24	128	18.6
2 Total		143	689*	100%

(*of total TTT 689 seconds. See table 10) (Partially cited in Holland and Shortall, 2001: 38, and Lightbrown and Spada 1999: 94 and 104)

5.3.1 Commentary on table 12.

- Teacher talk types increased in lesson two. These are numbered as: 3, 4, 12, and 13. Some teacher talk types were redundant, but for comparative analyses with lesson one, they are included for completeness.
- Desisting from asking display questions, striving to increase thought processes, I asked convergent and divergent questions, resulting in more student enthusiasm. Questioning and elicitation time fell overall, allowing for more student-student learner-led autonomy.
- TTT increased through instructions but fell quite dramatically through explanations. Aligned with the interviewees' concerns (see appendix two), error correction was reduced. An increase in praising stabilised the students' current low confidence levels.

5.4 Commentary on tables. (See appendices))

Table 13. A taxonomy of actual teacher speech units lesson two – raw data.

Too much elaboration occurred during the listening activity due to introducing Unit 9 of a new textbook - *English Firsthand*. The students required direction over what the goals of the exercises were. Once becoming more familiar with the arrangement, and accustomed to the layout, less TT will be needed.

Table 14. Activity types.

After responding to the students' request for more listening practice, it transpired that the level was slightly inapposite to a few of the Intermediate-low learners. More repeat chances to listen were requested and proffered, elongating the intended length of time to be spent on activity 2, but concomitantly increasing learner decision making and opportunities for learner uptake. Far more student-led interaction occurred. Furthermore, the activities allowed for differing learner styles, but more in proportion to leaner styles.

5.5 Code switching and rate of speech.

The use of L1 was 4.5% compared to lesson one's 1.6%, having reduced the need for lengthy or repetitive L2 explanations. Word-per-minute count (wpm) figures* were recorded for lesson two:

- Explanations in English – 116wpm. (Lesson one – 102wpm)
- Explanations in Japanese – 165wpm.
- Instructions – 114. (Lesson one – 107wpm)
- Other speech types – 112 (no change).

An awareness of speech rate helped lower TTT.

* Extrapolations from utterances of 5 to 10 seconds. Slight derivations may exist.

5.6 Post lesson class discussion.

After the second lesson, during an informal chat, I asked the eleven students present how they felt about the lesson. Preferring the new seating plan, and saying it allowed them to interact better, they could approach me more readily on personal terms. They would also like to swap seats every week to sit next to different people. However, some found it hard to see the board. The plan will therefore become more semi-circular. Using Firsthand Unit 9 allowed for student-generated learning opportunities. They would like to use the textbook again, reporting that the listening was challenging, but probably of more benefit than the short passages of their previous textbook. Classroom atmosphere changed positively and included more laughs, the students working cooperatively and decision making. Most saliently, all said that the lesson had been more productive than usual.

6.0 Conclusion

This action research project raised several salient features. Adopting a more communicative-based, student-led textbook increased and improved learner opportunities. I am convinced the students will benefit hugely if I can continue to develop my classroom awareness and preparation. Teacher explanation can further be reduced as students familiarise themselves with the new textbook's layout and goals.

As sole researcher on this project, my dependence upon a means of concomitantly recording the lesson for later analysis meant that in future I wish to collaborate with my OC colleagues.

> Collaborative action is potentially more empowering than action research conducted individually as it offers a strong framework for whole-school change. (Burns, 1999: 13)

In my working environment, whole OC department change is necessary. My colleagues and I should be careful to spot and act upon student indifference before it advances. In my class, student apathy towards EFL already seems to be dwindling, the findings thus far indicating that the students are redeveloping a healthy positive attitude to OC – detaching it from school achievement.

Now more consciously aware of my classroom actions, a reduction in TTT has already helped the target group become more autonomous. Bruner (1983, in Candlin and Mercer, 2001; 104) alerts teachers to be aware of conditions of student autonomy development. With the target group, and subsequently with other groups of different proficiency, there appears to already be greater student effort.

Recently re-taking a Personal Language Teaching Methodology Profile, to assess whether my attitudes towards methodology have altered or become firmer, I now seem more convinced before of the benefits of:

> 'Learner or learner centred approaches: an emphasis on learning rather than teaching,

> process rather than product; creating conditions that will activate/facilitate effective learning processes, including encouraging learner autonomy, fostering … intrinsic motivation.' (Edwards et al. 1998: 9.)

Initially more inclined towards 'syllabus centred' approaches, I perhaps tried too hard to render the existing materials more exciting in an effort to convince the students of their benefit and fun. Conversely, providing alternative materials more suited to the students' desire to interact allowed them to take more control and get on with the learning process. Adopting what Crandall calls a 'cooperative structure' (in Arnold 199: 235), distribution of teacher talk has indeed become almost reverse that of a 'traditional' lesson. Over the period of an academic year, that adds up to a considerable difference in the number of students' oral communication opportunities.

Appendix One

Selective transcript and example of teacher-centred TTT 'event' (see highlighted figure of 15 in (a) of table 5). Occurred during activity 1.

1 Teacher :	***Whose bicycle is this one* ?** (2 seconds) [Pause] (3 seconds)
2	***Oh, not that one, sorry – here!*** Pointing towards board (3 seconds)
3 Student 1 :	Big one or other one? (2 seconds) [Pause](1 second)
4 Teacher :	Pointing finger towards smaller of the two. (3 seconds)
5 Students :	Eh! Too small! (1 second)
6 Teacher :	***I like small bikes*.** (said crouching down) (2 seconds)
7 Students :	Laughter

Key to lines 1, 3, and 6.

1. Display question.
2. Clarification.
3. Other.

The 15 seconds of this scene, from opening to closing, were teacher-fronted. Actual teacher speaking time was 7 seconds. This is representative of pause time almost equalling actual speaking time, (see table 4).

<u>Appendix Two:</u> Transcript from the student interview following results analysis of lesson one.

This transcript is taken from the discussion with the two selected students.

<u>Proficiency levels:</u>

Student 1, Intermediate-high.

Student 2, Intermediate-low.

Both students are categorised as 'communicative' learners (see table 2).

The author conducted the interview in Japanese. The translation was verified by the Japanese Teacher of English.

The name 'Thomas' refers to the author.

<u>Transcript One.</u> Relates to students' opinions on their OC lesson.

Teacher :	I'm interested to know how your OC classes are different to your other English lessons. What can you tell me about them?
Student 1 :	Erm, in our regular class we always just read from the text book.
Student 2 :	It's boring. Only reading.
Student 1 :	Yeah, but we do have one grammar lesson, but all the others are reading.
Teacher :	Right, I see. Do you think you have enough opportunities to practice OC in my lesson?
Student 1 :	Er, so-so. Maybe not enough.
Student 2 :	It's a bit embarrassing for most people in the class to be speaking in English. We don't get embarrassed in our Chinese or Korean lessons, but I think that in English we are too concerned about making mistakes.
Student 1 :	That is a problem. It's not especially a problem with Thomas, but we are scared to make mistakes. But not in the Spanish class.
Teacher :	What do mean, it's a problem but not a problem with Thomas?
Student 1:	Well, you don't correct all our mistakes. But,…but [long pause].
Teacher :	I see. What about the class atmosphere? It always seems that you enjoy the lesson and get along and learn something from it.
Student 1 :	Well, I think that too many people in the class are too shy to talk sometimes, but we do like listening to foreign people.
Student 2 :	We want to talk more in English sometimes. But maybe our confidence is down a bit.
Teacher :	Why?

Appendix two continued.

Student 2: Well, we just finished our tests, and the results were not good.

Teacher : Does the OC class help you prepare for your tests.

Students : No, not at all. Our tests are for reading and writing only. And grammar.

Teacher : Right. So, how about we use our text book less, and every week do a short, small-group, round table chat about any topic.

Student 1 : Not every week. Sometimes is okay.

Teacher : Sometimes. I see. I've been thinking recently about changing your seating arrangement. I don't really like the 'eyes-front', rows style.

Student 1 : Yeah, I think a square would be good with Thomas in the middle, like this. [Draws a three sides of a square, and teacher in the middle] Then we could see each other more. How many students are in our class?

Teacher : Thirteen.

Student 2 : Thirteen! I thought it was less.

Teacher : There's one more thing I want to ask you. Do you think that I talk too much in your lessons?

Students : [Long pause]

Teacher : What I mean is, is my speaking often helpful to you, or do you want me to be quiet a bit more and let you do more practice.

Student 1: Erm, well. I said that too many students are shy in the class, and recently they want to use Japanese. So maybe they are happy to listen to you. But also, we really want to do some good listening practice.

Teacher : Interesting. Do you want to say something about that (calling S2's name)?

Student 2 : Erm, I don't really know.

Teacher : Okay, I see. Thank you girls. Let's change the seating plan this Friday and try a couple of new activities, and more listening with less textbook use. Okay?

Students : Yes. Sounds good.

Table 13 A taxonomy of actual teacher speech units lesson two– raw data (seconds).

Teacher speech types	Activity types				
	Start lesson Register, seating	**1** **Planning the holidays**	**2** **Listening to tape**	**3** **Conversation time**	**4** **Invitation, listen to tape**
1. Display questions		Whole group			
		Individuals			
2. Referential questions		Whole group			
		5,2,3			
		Individuals			
3. Convergent questions		Whole group			
		Individuals			
			3,2,2	2,	
4. Divergent questions		Whole group			
		Individuals			
			6,2,3,5	3,3,	

Table 13 Taxonomy of actual teacher speech units lesson two – raw data (seconds) continued.

5. Instructions		Whole group			
		10,3,2,2,5,3,2,4,3	5,4,22,22,7,2,		8,7,6
		Individuals			
				6,	
6. Explanations		4,1,4,2,2,2,3,2,2,2,2	37,16,2,4,3,10,2,3,2, 3,2,3,2,4,3,6,2,5,1	49,4,4,3,1,2,6,7,8, 5,	2,9
7. Elicitation		6	3,2,4,4,2,2,4,3,2,		3,4
8. Error correction or negotiation		Whole group			
		2		3	
		Individuals			
9. Answering questions		Ss' questions			
		5,1,8		4,3,5,2	
		T's questions			

10. Repetition or clarification		T asks Ss to repeat or clarify a point			
		2	2,2,3,15,		
		T repeats or clarifies a point to Ss			
		6			

11. T praises			2,3	2,1,4	
12. Interaction			3,2,2,3,		
13. Procedural	2,2,7,2,2,2,2,2,				16
14. Other*	5,7,		4,11,2,4,2,2,3,3,3,2,2	4,3,6,2,2	2,11,21,10,14,3

*Teacher speech type 14 'Other' refers to letting the students choose the next stage of learning, short jokes, and teacher demonstrations

Appendix Four

Activity types. (see 6.5)

Table 14 Breakdown of activity types and amount of teacher talk

Activity type	%age of lesson time on activity	**Frequency of actual teacher speaking***	%age of activity spent by actual teacher speaking time
0. Procedural. Taking the register, preparing to start.	5.7 233 seconds	8 21 seconds	To whole group 9.0 To individuals 0
1. Planning the holidays. Ss decide certainty of language. (I'll go/ I'm going to go/ I might go)	18.5 757 seconds	39 110 seconds	14.5
2. Listening to CD. Fill in the blanks. Pair checking.	45.1 1841 seconds	59 290 seconds	15.8
3. Conversation time. Chat with various partners about plans.	16.7 681 seconds	30 151 seconds	To whole group 18.9 To individuals 3.2
4. Writing exercise. Check by listening and conferring.	14.0 573 seconds	14 116 seconds	20.2
Total	100 4085 seconds	150 688 seconds	(**Mean Ave. 13.6+ per activity type**)

*means Total Units of. (See Table 13 for teacher speech type categories.)
+excluding procedural to individuals at 0%.

Activity types

1. Structure-based, but including some student-autonomy.
2. Structure-based, but quite extensive listening.
3. Communication-based. Free practice.
4. Structure-based, then communicative-based.

Balance of TT in all the activities was far better attuned to the activity type than in lesson one, resulting in greater opportunities for student involvement

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